

Slow Ride by gameofboners

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Summary: Ringo Wheeler had enough problems - she was named after a member of a band she doesn't even like, she can't find her favourite record in any store along the East Coast and she pissed her parents off enough to be shipped to Indiana. Now, she has a new set of problems - being the 'new kid', sharing a room with her cousin Nancy and Nancy's intolerable boyfriend, Steve Harrington.

1. Big Bird

HELL, RINGO WHEELER HAD DISCOVERED, was not an underground lair where demons and souls of the damned resided.

She may have only been seventeen years of age, but the girl knew full well that Hell came in a number of forms. Like recovering Christmas decorations and discovering that, once again, the lights had been tangled mercilessly despite your best efforts in packing them the year before. Or catching your parents in the middle of sex. Or even grabbing your curling iron by the wrong end.

Or having to move to Hawkins, Indiana.

The town was smaller than her neighbourhood back home, and in the space of a day - had proved every stereotype about small towns true. The parents were backward with their views, and all teenagers were hoodlums, simply looking for something to entertain themselves with within the dreariness. Those who weren't, were considered prudish and boring.

It was the cruelest punishment her family could have come up with, and she had to applaud them for it. They had threatened to send her away from their tiny house in Orlando to Indiana since she was a child, but now they weren't just threatening it any more.

Sure, her uncle and aunt weren't all that bad. Her aunt Karen pitied her to an extent, which was a horrible feeling, but meant she showered her with baked goods and gifts. Her uncle Ted, her father's brother, didn't care much for her - she wouldn't be surprised if Ted hadn't even noticed her since she arrived. The man was completely out of tune with his surroundings.

The only slight advantage to the stay was her relationship with her cousins, Nancy and Mike - who were both complete polar opposites, but came together when Ringo was around.

"You can't just lie in here all day," Nancy commented as she entered their now shared room, raising an eyebrow at her cousin - who laid spread eagle on the cot set up for her.

"I can, and I will," she retorted in a bored tone, just about hearing Nancy's voice over the loud songs flooding through her headphones.

'Ringo's Ass Kicking Mix' was a tape she had childishly made when she was twelve and angry at the world, fast forward five years and the songs were still of a comfort to her. Even if she had to hide the name of the tape from anyone in the nearby vicinity.

"I'm meeting up with Steve tonight, we're all going to a bonfire. It'd be a good way for you to meet the kids at school?" Nancy offered, biting her lip.

"Eh," she brushed off, waving her hand in the air and closing her eyes again.

"You're only here for a few months, Ringo," Nancy pointed out, "you may as well make the best of it."

"If I go near a large fire right now, I may get tempted to throw myself into it," Ringo huffed, rolling around onto her stomach, flipping her long, fluffy blonde hair over her shoulder.

"It's either that or staying here with Mike and his gang of geeks playing Dungeons and Dragons," she replied in a sing-song voice, looking through her drawers for an outfit for the night.

"You were even dorkier than he was at that age!" She laughed, recalling the time when the girls would dress up in ridiculous fantasy outfits and parade around the house with toy swords.

Sighing once more, Ringo pulled herself up to a sitting position before standing upright, heading towards her suitcase which was stuffed into the corner.

"I hope you have other friends there, I don't want to third wheel with you and Steven," Ringo sounded out as she opened up her case, sifted through the large mound of her clothes.

"First of all, will you unpack that already? Second of all, Barb will be there and third, it's *Steve*."

"Unpacking would be a sign of defeat," she refuted stubbornly,

prompting Nancy to roll her eyes.

"So, Ringo," Karen began, smiling happily at the younger girl, "are you all excited for your first day at school tomorrow?"

"I'd literally rather lick a dirty tyre," she replied, with a sweet smile to lessen the blow before shoving another forkful of peas into her mouth.

"Our tyres out there are looking rather grimy if you want to have a go at it," Ted interjected, chuckling to himself, which was cut off by a swift glare from Karen.

"Mom," Nancy spoke up, "I wanted to take Ringo to Barb's tonight so they could meet. Is that alright?"

"I don't know, honey," she mulled it over, "are you gonna be late? It's a school night."

"Not for me, if those tyres have anything to do with it," Ringo cut in, causing Mike to giggle into his plate as he shoved the food around.

"Ringo," she reprimanded, then turning back to Nancy.

"You're going to that bonfire tonight, aren't you?" Mike whispered to his cousin.

"Yep," she nodded her head.

"Knew it," he hissed, smirking wildly. "Can you push her into it?" He nodded his head towards Nancy.

"I think if we gave her to the fire, the fire would soon give her back," she raised her eyebrows comically, causing him to laugh again.

Mike Wheeler had always looked up to his cousin. She was always the coolest in his eyes, always so chill and laid back, never letting anything affect her. His friends had always held childhood crushes on her, particularly when she accompanied them in the basement to join in on their roleplaying games.

"You don't want Ringo going to school without knowing anyone, do you?" Nancy moaned, "we'll be back at eleven. Tops!"

"Fine," her mother sighed tiredly, giving in and throwing her husband another glare for not offering his opinion even once.

Ringo had to eventually borrow a jacket from Nancy, who had laughed hysterically when her cousin came out of the bathroom wearing only a band t-shirt, shorts and boots.

"You are going to freeze to death! It's October!" Nancy cackled again, opening her closet and searching for a moment. She took out a coat and handed it over.

Nancy had promised that even with the coat, she would freeze in the shorts. But alas, Ringo was nothing if not stubborn, and insisted it was only a little cold air, she would be fine.

When eight o'clock approached, Nancy and Ringo shouted a goodbye to the rest of the family. They walked silently down the sidewalk until they reached the corner, where Steve's car was parked exactly where he said it'd be.

Steve got out right away, rounding the car to meet Nancy. His eyes hadn't even glanced over to Ringo, who stood there awkwardly while they shared a kiss.

Unfortunately for her, she was starting to understand what Nancy meant. Her hands were tucked into her armpits as her body began to shiver from the cold. The longer she stood there, the more she would shake, and the more frustrated she'd become.

"Alright!" She shouted finally, breaking the two apart as if they had been zapped. "He's not going off to war we're going out, get in the damn car!"

Nancy flushed in embarrassment, moving around Steve and rushing to the passenger side. But her boyfriend however, was in no such rush, looking offended that she had broke them off.

"Who are you?" He asked, his eyes narrowed as he gave her a quick

once over.

"Ringo, Nancy's cousin," she answered, pushing aside her manners and moving towards the back seat to get inside the car.

"What kind of name is Ringo?" He asked cheekily, scoffing and finally returning to the drivers side as she got in.

There was another couple in the backseat along with her, the girl looked at her as if she were dog shit on her shoe.

"Tommy, nice to meet you," the boy greeted, holding his hand out and grinning flirtatiously.

"Ringo," she offered reluctantly, shaking his hand before quickly dropping it and turning to look out the window.

"Ringo? Like that *dude's* name from the Beatles?" She bristled at his emphasis on the gender of said member.

"Yes," she simply stated, not giving him an opening to continue.

"But aren't you a girl?"

"No," she looked at him as if he had said the most shocking thing, suddenly faking an English accent, "I *am* Ringo Starr. I just look really great for my age and decided long blonde hair looked good on me."

"Jesus," he muttered in response, while Nancy had held back a giggle and even Steve's lips upturned in amusement. "Well aren't you just prickly like a cactus?"

Ringo didn't answer, she was getting bad vibes from their entire group - Steve included. In truth, while some people tended to shy away when they were uncomfortable, Ringo was the exact opposite - and became rather 'prickly', as he had put it.

Nancy let out a small sigh as she watched half of her school year drool over the new girl. Truly, she didn't know why Ringo would be so reluctant to meet everyone - because instead of treating her like the new, weird kid, they fawned over her like a new toy.

Ringo was pretty, in a classic way that Nancy wished she was able to master. Even growing up, all the boys in the playground had wanted to play with the cool girl, and only ever asked Nancy when they were asking what her cousin's name was.

She didn't hate her for it, because Ringo had never once taken advantage of it. Every time someone had tried to tug Ringo away to play on the swings, Ringo dragged Nancy along. If they talked in a group and Nancy had spoken without anyone else hearing, her cousin would always acknowledge what she said. There were countless sleepovers as pre-teens spent with Ringo reassuring Nancy that she was even prettier than her, and that boys were stupid and only attracted to confidence.

It was also why Nancy would never let go of her friendship with Barb, no matter how much Tommy and Carol tried to force her to. She had learned that lesson from Ringo from a young age. Friends over boys, always.

Justin Kercher was in the midst of asking Ringo out, and when Nancy had noticed her cousin making wide eyes at her, she rushed to her safety.

"Ringo! Come meet my friend!" She interrupted their conversation, Ringo sighing with relief and waving a quick goodbye to Justin.

"God, thank you so much," she whispered to her, prompting a fit of giggles to erupt from the two.

"This is my best friend Barb," Nancy introduced the two, secretly sneaking a glance around to see where her boyfriend had run off to.

"Hi!" They both greeted with a smile, "wow, I love your outfit!" Ringo added, eliciting a humble chuckle from Barb, cheeks reddened slightly.

"Thanks! I love yours too!"

"No you don't, I'm so cold right now my ass cheeks have frozen together into one giant cheek," she laughed off.

"Hey babe," a voice purred into Nancy's ear, arms wrapping around

from behind. Nancy smiled and leaned into his touch as he peppered kisses down her neck.

Barb and Ringo made eye contact before simultaneously gagging, which Steve rolled his eyes at.

"Hey what's that freak doing here?" He asked out of nowhere. The girls followed his eye line, Nancy sighing when she noticed Jonathan Byers was the object of his insult.

"Freak?" Ringo echoed, narrowing her eyes.

"Oh boy," Nancy whispered, pulling away from Steve and standing beside Barb, not wanting to get involved in the coming conflict.

"Did I stutter?" He raised his eyebrows at her, giving her a once over and crossing his arms over his chest.

"No, but your mouth is so tightly packed with shit I wouldn't judge you if you had," she mimicked his pose, standing in front of him and tilting her head back to see his face from her height.

"By all means, if you want to defend him, let *him* give you a ride home instead."

"I might just do that, because your car," Ringo stepped closer, their chests almost touching as she spat her words, "smells like a ballsack that hasn't been washed in a year."

Steve's face contorted, in anger or surprise he wasn't sure, his eyes couldn't help but follow the girl as she turned and stomped her way across the open field to Jonathan, who was standing by himself, all the while muttering under her breath calling him a 'big bird looking son of a bitch'.

He had never been spoken to like that before, at least, never by a girl and to his face.

"Hi!" Ringo was greeting from the other side of the field. "I'm Ringo Wheeler!"

Jonathan was startled, his eyes wide as his gaze scraped over the

stranger now in front of him.

"U-uh, like the-" he stuttered in nervousness.

"The guy from the Beatles? Yeah. I get that a lot," she sighed in exasperation, forcing a smile anyway.

"I was actually going to say like the rapid dog that runs along down Maple Street," he smiled softly, completely taking her by surprise. Ringo smiled in appreciation and let out a chuckle.

"Yeah, my owners let me off my leash tonight," she carried along with it.

"I'm Jonathan Byers," he offered his hand out, which she shook. "Wheeler? Like Nancy and Mike?"

"Yeah, they're my cousins. I'm staying with them for a while," she explained.

"Oh," he said dumbly, not sure of how to continue the conversation. Thankfully, Ringo did instead, and lead the majority of the conversation so it never had a dull moment. That was how the rest of the night went, the two sitting by the bonfire and discussing everything from Star Wars to music.

"Ringo!" Nancy called out, breaking them from their bubble. "Are you coming home with us? We've got to be back by eleven!"

She hesitated, not all that eager to get in a car with Big Bird and his evil sidekicks.

"I can give you a ride home," Jonathan asked suddenly, causing Nancy's eyes to widen. "I-I mean, if you want."

"Really?" Ringo beamed happily, nodding her head in agreement. "Yeah, if you don't mind! Nancy I've got a ride home, give Big Bird a kiss goodnight for me!"

"Um... how am I going to explain that we went to Barb's if I come home without you?" Nancy pointed up.

"Ugh!" Ringo groaned, dragging herself up off the ground and turning to her cousin, "I'm coming. See ya later, Jonathan!"

"Bye!" He murmured quietly, waving his hand.

"Nancy?" Ringo called out, around a half hour after they had settled into bed.

Her cousin, who was just after falling asleep, groaned and turned around in her bed.

"What?" Her voice grumbled, pushing her sleeping mask up to her forehead.

"Why are you with Steve?" Ringo rolled around onto her stomach, tucking her pillow underneath her chin.

"Ringo," she whined, pulling her mask back down. "He's not that bad, okay?"

"He's a complete cliché!" Ringo complained, "I bet he's the school bully and everything!"

"No that would be Tommy," Nancy sighed, "you don't have to like him, but just be nice to him, please? For me?"

Ringo only hummed in reply, refusing to promise anything.

Hi hi! I hope everyone enjoyed the chapter!

I had this idea and couldn't get it out of my head, so now I'm writing it and seeing how it goes.

Just for some back story, I've seen a couple of fics paint Nancy as a bitch or annoying (no shade to anyone), because as much as I love Stranger Things - they show kinda ruined her character and her potential. I want this book to be filled with loving female friendships.

Have a nice day and I hope you enjoy the book!

2. Groovy Tunes

"Bye, Mrs Wheeler!" Ringo waved as she stepped out of the car along with Nancy, the older woman huffing in response.

"I told you to call me Karen!" She called, but her shout was cut off by the slamming shut of the car door.

Ringo gripped the straps of her backpack tightly to prevent her hands from shaking, unable to stop the fact her stomach was in knots. Nancy was quick to pick up on her cousins reluctance.

"Don't worry, Ringo," she soothed, smiling warmly at her. "You'll be okay. You have me and Barb. And... Jonathan, by the looks of last night."

Ringo's eyebrows furrowed at her tone towards the end, but deciding to ignore it, trudged onwards towards the entrance.

Almost like a scene from a movie, the second she stepped in, all eyes had turned their way. It wasn't as if Ringo considered herself something to be stopped and stared at, but the fact was - Hawkins was a small town. Anyone new was bound to attract attention.

"Do you need me to show you to your locker or anything?" Nancy offered kindly, her body half turned towards the right hand hallway.

"No it's fine, you go ahead," Ringo urged, waving goodbye at her and walking on to find her locker by herself. She actually did need her help, but she could tell Nancy was antsy to be somewhere and didn't want to be a bother.

After walking around aimlessly for about ten minutes, she finally located her locker, sighing in relief. Shuffling through the pocket of her leather jacket, she uncovered the small piece of paper with the code that would hopefully unlock the lock.

Unfortunately for her, it didn't budge after she turned the knob in the correct sequence.

"Oh shit," she muttered, looking around and hoping no one saw her

anxious state. Concentrating even harder, she entered it once more - but once again the lock refused to give way.

The last thing Ringo wanted to do was go to the office and complain about her locker.

"Here," a familiar voice resounded from behind her, startling her enough to cause her to jump. "I had this locker last year, you have to push the centre in afterwards."

Steve Harrington leaned around her and pressed the centre of the lock harsh enough for his thumb to turn white, but sure enough, the lock opened and she was able to get inside her locker.

"Um, thanks," she stammered, confused by his random act of kindness. In truth, Steve was one of the main reasons she was so backward about having to go to school today. From what she heard, he seemed to be a rather popular figure head here - if he tainted everyone's view of her so early in her time there, it would make things quite difficult.

"So, how's being the new kid?" He asked, leaning against the locker beside hers as she placed her notebooks inside, crossing his arms over his chest.

"As horrible as you'd expect," she admitted, chuckling softly. If he was being civil, she decided she would be too.

"What's your first class?" He asked, rudely taking her timetable from her hand and looking it over. "We have a lot of the same classes, are you a junior too?"

"Yeah," she narrowed her eyes slightly at his gesture, but again, ignored it and turned back to shut her locker door.

If he was going to ignore their argument last night, then she would too.

Steve handed her back her timetable, which she neatly tucked back inside her leather jacket.

"Well, see you around Rin'," he spoke as he turned around and began

to walk back up the hallway.

"It's-" she began, ready to correct him on her name, expecting him to have forgotten it, but he beat to her to the punch.

"I know," he interrupted her, not even looking back as he did so. She furrowed her eyebrows, wondering where the nickname had come from. But it didn't matter she supposed, because she rather liked it.

Sitting in her English class, Ringo had luckily escaped the "introduce yourself" segment so far today, by some stroke of luck.

Her teachers hadn't seemed to care enough to force her into it, which was just fine with her. Mrs Snider handed her their curriculum for the semester, informing her she would need to catch up on the material they had read so far if she hadn't already covered them in her previous school.

Taking a quick skim over the list, Ringo raised her eyebrows and let out a small huff, muttering under her breath.

"One female author on the whole list?" She shook her head, catching the attention of the girl in the desk beside hers.

"It's ridiculous right?" The girl whispered to her with a roll of her eyes, Ringo blushed slightly, embarrassed she had been caught talking to herself. "She only has one female poet on the list as well, and that's Sylvia Plath. It's like, fuck Emily Dickinson, right?"

"Right? And 'Pride and Prejudice' is amazing don't get me wrong, but what about the Brontë sisters? Or Harper Lee? They even have Romeo and Juliet down here, I swear it feels like we have learned that play ever since kindergarten," Ringo ranted along with her, her desk mate waving up her hands in agreement. They started to laugh after she finished her speech.

"I'm Jessica, by the way," she told her, smiling brightly.

"I'm Ringo," she replied in return. If Jessica thought her name was weird, she didn't comment on it.

That was how the rest of their class went, with each of the two passing comments about their teacher and her 'laid-back' approach to teaching. After the bell rang, they walked out together to the hallway, where they unfortunately had to part ways to go to their individual classes.

"Hey, we should hang out sometime!" Jessica called to her, walking backwards so she could face Ringo.

"Definitely!" She agreed eagerly, a warm and fuzzy feeling enveloping her, knowing she made a new friend.

"There you are!" Nancy exclaimed, ten minutes after the final bell had rang. They were due to meet at the front entrance right away so they could leave, but Ringo had gotten caught up with boys in the class trying to talk to her. "What took so long?"

"Sorry," she muttered, hitching her backpack straps up higher on her shoulder. "Ready to go?"

"Sure," Nancy agreed, but her high tone of voice and the way her teeth nibbled her lower lip told her otherwise.

"What is it?"

"It's just... Steve's gonna give us a ride home," she said quietly, fearing her cousins reaction.

"That's fine," Ringo shrugged, moving past Nancy to trail down the steps.

"Okay then," Nancy huffed in surprise, following after her after a moment.

Ringo let Nancy lead the way towards the car in the parking lot, now that it was bright outside, she finally got a glimpse of his car and held back a scoff.

"A BMW? Really? How old is this kid, seventeen or seventy?" She complained quietly to Nancy, who shushed her quickly before they reached him.

He was standing, leaning against the car with sunglasses on, oozing cockiness. An easy grin fell on his face at the sight of the two Wheeler girls.

"Hop in ladies," he gestured to his overly fancy car, opening the passenger side door for Nancy while Ringo climbed into the back.

"Oh how the other half live," she sighed bitterly as he climbed into the drivers seat.

"What was that, doll face?" He called back to her, raising his eyebrows in his rear view mirror.

"Oh, nothing!" She called back, her voice high and sugary sweet.

Nancy reached over and began to turn the knob on the radio, static flickering as she would land on a station and then change it over if she didn't like the song.

Ringo's ears picked up at familiar tones of one in particular, flying her hand out to grab Nancy's shoulder.

"Woah! Stop there!" She commanded, and the slightly younger girl did so, frightened by her sudden outburst.

"I didn't take you for a Fleetwood Mac fan, Ringo," Steve commented casually. Nancy turned in her seat with an eager smile.

"Oh she's a huge fan, Ringo tell him the story about the album!" She suggested, hoping to form a friendship between them, or at least an acquaintance.

"I'd rather not," she huffed from the back seat.

"Fine, then I'll tell it!" Nancy continued, Ringo rolling her eyes.

"Ever since Ringo was ten, she's been searching for their Rumours vinyl but *every* time she goes into a record store they don't have any in stock," Nancy gushed, Steve furrowed his brows, not understanding the significance.

"I don't understand, go to a different record store then?" He suggested

dumbly.

"Yeah, no shit," Ringo drily answered, "I've been to a total of sixteen different stores, numerous times each. So Nancy and I have deduced that I am completely jinxed. Or cursed."

"That's kinda weird," he mused, "isn't it one of the most popular albums of all time?"

"Yes!" Ringo threw her hands up frustratedly, still angry that she never got her hands on that record. To this day, she still tried.

"Well, how about we go to the one in town right now?" He offered, looking swiftly over his shoulder at the blonde.

"Oh," she was taken aback by the sudden kindness, "it's okay, I don't want to trouble you."

"No, it'll be fun. We'll see if you really are cursed," he smiled, taking the next turn that would lead them in the complete opposite direction of the Wheeler house.

Nancy narrowed her eyes in confusion at her boyfriend, trying to understand his motives. She liked Steve Harrington, truly, but she didn't necessarily like him for his kindness or generosity, or lack thereof. She always thought his sweet side was something only she would ever get to see.

They pulled up to 'Groovy Tunes' record store a few minutes after, another benefit of living in a small town. Ringo tried not to get her hopes up once again, but it was proving difficult. The last time she had tried this store, it was when she was visiting Hawkins at the age of fourteen.

The trio trailed inside, looking around at the expanse of record bins littered on tables around the shop.

"Okay, team," she became all formal, turning to the other two with wild eyes, "spread out! You have your mission!"

The small group dispersed, taking an aisle each and flicking through each and every vinyl, searching for the cream cover with the black

and white depiction of Nicks and Fleetwood.

Eventually, Ringo and Steve were facing each other, searching through opposing bins on the same table. She tried to focus on the vinyls beneath her fingers, but couldn't help but let her eyes drift up in curiosity to see the tall boy she was insulting the night before - actually helping her.

She hadn't realised she was staring until Steve looked up, feeling her gaze on him. Ringo quickly looked back down, hoping he thought nothing of it, but the chuckle escaping his lips and slight shake of his head said otherwise.

Finally, twenty minutes later, they had to accept defeat after scouring the entire shop. Ringo marched up to the clerk at the till.

"Hi," she put on her most charming smile for the teenager, who's eyes widened upon seeing her in front of him. "I was just wondering, do you by any chance have Rumours by Fleetwood Mac anywhere in this store? I can't seem to find it."

Steve and Nancy watched in amusement as she completely dazzled the boy, who practically scampered off his stool to help her.

"Well, I'm so sorry Miss but we just sold the last copy we had earlier today," he looked downtrodden to have to give her negative news. "Is there anything else you need? I'd be happy to help!"

"No it's fine, thanks anyway," she shook her head, stepping backwards. Ringo looked clearly deflated from the disappointment, her tone lower than before as she refused to meet the eyes of the other two.

She set off back to the car, moving into the backseat without a word. Steve and Nancy shared a glance before following after her, returning to their respective seats.

"So," Steve tried to break the tension, "you really are cursed, huh?"

"Yeah," she forced a chuckle, "thanks for taking me anyway, Steve. I appreciate it."

"I- no problem," he stammered, as confused by her politeness as she had been by him.

"What are you dorks doing?" Ringo's voice called out as she stepped down to the basement, enthused by the shouting she had heard from upstairs.

"Dungeons and Dragons!" They called back, a chorus of voices. Dustin had completely abandoned the game, standing up to greet her, readjusting his cap.

"Hi, Ringo!" He greeted excitedly, causing her to chuckle.

"Hey, Dustin. It's good to see you all again, boys," she settled down on the couch cushions spread out on the ground near their table, eager to watch them for entertainment.

"Are you gonna stay here and watch us, dork?" Mike reared around and asked, causing her to hold her hands up in surrender.

"Yes I am, loser, problem with that?"

"No!" The other three called back, interrupting Mike before he could answer.

Ignoring her, they all turned around to continue on with their game, while Ringo tried to pay attention as best as she could and making comments here and there.

"Something is coming, something hungry for blood..." Mike began a speech, his voice dropped low and deadly serious.

"Ooooh is it Nancy?" Ringo asked in amusement, receiving a glare from all at the table.

"A shadow grows on the wall behind you, swallowing you in darkness," Mike continued after not-so-subtly clearing his throat. "*It is almost here.*"

"What is it?" Will begged, the sweetest among the group, Ringo knew.

"I told you, it's Nancy!" She interjected again, causing Mike to whirl around and throw the pillow he was kneeling on at her face.

"Do you mind? This is a serious game!" He shouted at her, but she barely heard him over her fit of laughter.

"What if it's the demogorgan?" Dustin asked fearfully, "Jesus we are so screwed if it's the demogorgan!"

"It's not the demogorgan," Lucas disagreed.

Ringo began to zone out, leaning back against the wall and picking up a stray comic book to flip through. Until Mike suddenly shouted and slammed a figure down onto the table, and she nearly had a heart attack in shock.

"Jesus guys! I'm older than you, I'm more prone to heart attacks!" Her complaints fell on deaf ears, as they all started to shout over each other about their 'next action'.

Will had rolled a set of die, which subsequently fell onto the floor, prompting the kids to search after it.

"Move!" Mike shouted at her, "you could be sitting on it!"

"But I'm so comfy," she teased, relaxing further into her spot. Mike grabbed her foot and began to drag her, but when he wasn't strong enough to budge her, the other three joined in and each grabbed a limb.

"Alright Jesus! I think I'd know if a dice was digging into my ass!" She complained, getting up from her spot and letting them look underneath.

"Mike!" Karen called down from the basement door.

"Mom! We're in the middle of a campaign!" He whined in frustration.

"Not any more! Fifteen after!"

Mike sprinted up the stairs to beg for more time to play, so Ringo tried to help the boys search.

"Does a seven count?" Will asked Lucas.

"Did Mike see it?" Will shook his head. "Then it doesn't count!"

"Oh boys, you want me to *hide* that from my *cousin*?" She teased them, scrunching up her face.

"Come on Ringo! I'll give you leftover pizza!" Dustin purred at her, dangling the box towards her.

"If there's pizza leftover in this basement, guaranteed there's some type of bodily fluid on it. So no thanks!" She shook her head, helping tidy up the basement for Mike as Dustin ran off to ask Nancy.

After they had all left, waving goodbye to her, very quickly she became bored and missed the camaraderie.

Ringo walked back upstairs towards her and Nancy's room, and stopped before opening the door at the sound of her cousin's voice flooding through the wood.

"No, Barb. I'm not being silly. Steve's the most popular guy in school, guys like that don't go for me they go for girls like Ringo," her voice was full of sadness, making Ringo's chest twinge with guilt. She hated that Nancy felt insecure around her.

Ringo couldn't hear Barb's answer, but she did hear Nancy's.

"Because she's confident and brave and just perfect, and I'm like the dorky girl. It doesn't make sense on pen and paper."

Ringo sighed once more, this time in frustration. She hated how Nancy saw her as perfect, when the exact opposite was true. If she was half as brave as Nancy thought she was, she would tell her about her life in Orlando before she came here. Then Nancy would know there was no cause for envy.

Deciding she had heard enough, Ringo opened the door and went straight to her cot, tugging her headphones over her head and listening to her mix tape once again.

3. Ass Kicker

"Is your cousin *dating* Steve Harrington?" Jessica had randomly asked during their lunch, causing Ringo to pause mid-sandwich and screw her face up in disgust.

"Unfortunately," she admitted, following her friend's gaze towards the so called 'popular table', where Steve sat alongside his friends.

"Why?" Jessica pried, causing Ringo to chuckle.

"She must have a thing for guys with long hair that will fuck her over," Ringo shrugged, turning back and facing toward her friend again.

In truth, she didn't care for Steve Harrington at all in the days preceding. But now, she was curious. Because she had seen both sides of his personality: the spoiled, rich, white boy who dominated the school, and the sweeter side who liked to laugh and kiss his girl - also known as, the side of Steve that kept Nancy interested.

"Don't we all," Jessica sighed, looking off into the distance dramatically, gaining another chuckle from the blonde.

"Hey, Ringo right?" A voice came from beside her, a body to accompany it sliding into the chair next to Ringo's.

Ringo paused mid-bite again, chewing the rest of the food in her mouth before daring to talk to him. And so she could calm herself beforehand. The man now sitting with them was nothing short of God-like, his attractiveness alone made her nervous.

She shot a glance towards Jessica, who only rolled her eyes and continued to eat her grapes.

"Yeah, it's Ringo. And you are?" Her lips lifted into her signature grin, and it was clear he noticed her attempts at charming.

"I'm Daniel," he held his hand out for her, which she took carefully, giving it a gentle shake.

"And I'm Jessica," the dark haired girl interrupted with a cheesy grin, giving a small wave.

"Nice to meet you, too," he responded politely, holding his hand out for her to shake as well, something Ringo appreciated.

"So, everyone can't seem to stop talking about the new girl," he turned back to the blonde, giving her a quick once over.

"All good comments I'd hope?" She bantered, giving him a once over of her own.

"Better than good, babe," he replied, standing up from his chair and pointing his thumb towards the very table they had stared at moments earlier. "You wanna come have lunch with us?"

Ringo's eyebrows furrowed as she gave a quick glance back between Daniel and Jessica, her decision already made without debate.

"I'm good here, thanks anyway," she politely rejected, smiling sadly.

"Another time, then?" He winked, walking away from them but holding Ringo's eyes the entire time.

"Jesus, does this guy think he's in a John Hughes movie or what?" Jessica scoffed a laugh, snapping Ringo out of her daze. "I thought you would have gone with him to the Breakfast Club over there."

"And leave you? Never," Ringo shook her head.

"You could have brought me along," Jessica tilted her head.

"I knew you wouldn't have gone," she pointed out smartly. Jessica laughed and nodded when she realised she was right.

The second Nancy and Ringo returned home from school, they were bombarded by both Karen and Mike. Surprisingly, gossip had yet to spread, and the news of Will's disappearance hadn't reached the high school. It was safe to say, the two teenagers were horrified by the news.

"Have you guys heard anything?" Mike asked after his mother had explained the situation, hoping Will had called last night or this morning and the girls had forgotten to tell him.

"No," Ringo shook her head almost numbly. Child disappearances weren't as rare these days in America as one would like, but never had she dreamed it would happen to someone she knew. "God, this is just terrifying." She spoke quietly, scraping her hand through her hair and staying put while Nancy ran upstairs - likely to phone Barb. Or Steve.

Mike huffed in frustration and ran down to his basement, but Ringo was too surprised to do anything but think about the horrific circumstances Will could be in right now.

"You alright, sweetie?" Karen asked kindly, squeezing her arm. "You don't need to worry, you're safe with us. We live in a nice neighbourhood, the Byers didn't."

Ringo held in a scoff at the 'nice neighbourhood' comment, hating how they were able to sleep soundly while others couldn't. Brushing it aside, she settled for a nod of a head and offered to help with dinner.

Dinner itself was another bombardment from Mike, this time - it was directed at his parents. Nancy and Ringo sat quietly, too disturbed to even eat their food.

"We've been over this, Michael," Karen chastised him after he once again pleaded with her to help him look. "The chief said-"

"I don't care what the chief said!" He interrupted her. Ringo's eyes widened, but she stayed quiet. An outburst like that in her house would have been met with quite the punishment.

"Michael!" She scolded, dropping the small spoon of food she was attempting to get Holly to eat.

"We have to do something! Will could be in danger!" He begged, turning to Ringo for help. Her lips parted as she stuttered over her words, not wanting to be involved but knowing he needed her in his

corner.

"I don't know, Karen. Maybe joining the search party would be a good idea? I'm sure a lot of the locals are involved, it wouldn't be dangerous in a group," she offered, Mike throwing her a look of gratitude.

"The Chief doesn't think it's safe for kids to go and neither do I, end of discussion!" She slapped her hand onto the table, looking around each and every individual of talking age at the table and daring them to challenge her. No one dared to.

"So," Nancy began, swallowing quickly as she prepared to spin her lie, "Barb and I are going to study at her house tonight. That's cool, right?"

"No, not cool," Karen disagreed.

"What?! Why not?"

"Why do you think? Am I speaking Chinese in this house? No one leaves until we're sure that Will is okay," Ringo had to admit, their mother wasn't being unreasonable.

"This is such bullshit!" Nancy yelled, ignoring her father when he called her out for her language. "So we're under house arrest? Just because Mike's friend got lost on the way home-"

"God, Nancy, will you just shut up?" Ringo hissed, taking the slightly younger girl aback, but she couldn't hold it in for any longer. Mike's friend was missing, possibly kidnapped, and Nancy was annoyed because she couldn't see her boyfriend.

"Nancy, take that back, and Ringo, watch your language!" Karen demanded.

"No!" Nancy shouted stubbornly.

"I'm sorry Mrs Wheeler, but she's being an absolute brat!" Ringo dropped her fork and crossed her arms across her chest, glaring at her cousin, who glared at her in return.

Her and Nancy got along for the most part, but she couldn't deny her cousin could be significantly spoiled and privileged.

"You're just pissed off cos you wanna hang out with Steve!" Mike blurted, causing an eruption at the table. Ringo's eyes widened, slapping her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing. The Wheeler parents heads whipped around to face their eldest daughter.

"Steve?"

"Who is Steve?"

"Her new boyfriend!" Mike continued, completely exposing her in the most brutal way.

"God, you are such a douchebag, Mike!" She cried out, huffing and quite literally stomping her foot before storming off towards her bedroom. Mike and Ringo made eye contact, and rolled their eyes simultaneously at her hissy fit.

"You see, Michael?" His father spoke up after she had disappeared, "you see what happens?"

"What happens when what? I'm the only one acting normal here! I'm the only one who cares about Will!"

"That is really unfair son, we care," he answered back, his tone and demeanour suggesting the exact opposite. Much like his sister, this prompted Mike to huff and rush off towards his bedroom too.

The set of parents looked to Ringo, expecting her to have a meltdown too. But she simply sat there, pushing her food around with her fork.

"Wait, why didn't you want to go to Barb's too?" Karen questioned, causing Ringo's eyes to widen as she scrambled for an excuse.

"Um," she stammered, using the first thing that came to her head, "constipation?"

"Woah!" Ted hollered as Karen shook her head with her eyes closed, clearly disgusted. "I'm eating here!"

"So am I! Maybe these green beans will help!" She tried to recover, but only dug herself further into humiliation.

Ringo smiled politely, her cheeks burning as she got up from her chair and gestured towards the stair case, her exit significantly less dramatic than her cousins.

"Do you think she's going to the bathroom now?" Ted asked when she was out of sight. Karen's head whipped around, completely frustrated.

"I hope you're enjoying your chicken, Ted."

Ringo was in the middle of packing her backpack while Nancy was out of the room, stuffing things she thought she would need for the night ahead, like a flashlight and snacks. And definitely a coat this time.

She had come to the decision to sneak down to the basement and offer to take Mike with her to the search party as a chaperone, knowing full well he was probably going out of his mind with worry.

While her senses were on high alert out of fear of being caught sneaking out, a knock at the window of the bedroom scared her half to death, whirling around and clutching her chest.

She could have killed Steve Harrington at that moment, one push would have ended his life. Instead, she chose the morally correct option and trampled over to the window, sliding it up. Ringo suspected that Nancy was expecting him.

"Peeping in little girls windows are you now, Harrington?" She gave him a once over as he climbed through the open space, less than graceful.

"Believe me," he smirked suddenly at her, "Nancy's no little girl."

Ringo rolled her eyes and returned to her backpack, shoving more belongings into it as Steve wandered about curiously.

"Where is Nancy?"

"The bathroom," Ringo shrugged, not wanting to be here when they started to canoodle.

"Where are you going?" He asked nosily, sitting on the edge of Nancy's bed.

"Out," she answered, almost mysteriously. But also knowing that he would tell Nancy, who would tell her parents as revenge against Mike for his revelation at the dinner table.

"Hey, is this your Walkman?" He asked, reaching forward onto her cot and picking it up.

"Yeah, its mine," she shrugged, zipping up her backpack and throwing a glance over her shoulder. Ringo stopped her movements when she noticed him pressing the eject button.

"No!" She shouted, rushing forward and trying to get the Walkman off of him.

"Woah!" He laughed, dangling it up high so she wouldn't reach. Ringo wasn't even that small, he was just so damn *tall*. "What are you listening to that is *that* embarrassing?"

She watched, cheeks burning with redness as he opened up the compartment and slid the tape out. Ringo reached again, their bodies pressed together as she clawed at his arm to drag it down, but she couldn't stop him from reading it above his head.

"Ringo's Kicking Ass Mix'?" He quoted, eyes wide as he handed it back to her, Ringo snatching it from his grip, trying to shut out his howls of laughter. "What the hell?!"

"I was twelve when I made it, so shut up, you fluffy haired fuck!" She cursed, grasping at straws as she tried to ignore her own embarrassment.

"Calm down, Ringo," he wiped underneath his eyes, his body still shaking from laughter, "I wouldn't want you to... kick my ass!"

At this, he started laughing even harder. His face as red as Ringo's, except with exertion instead of embarrassment. His amusement was

contagious, and eventually she found herself giggling along with him, as much as she tried not to.

"You couldn't have named it something happy? Like 'Ringo's Sunshine and Rainbow's Mix'?" He suggested with a raise of his eyebrows, holding out his hand for the Walkman again and the headphones so he could investigate the content of the tape in question.

Sliding it back inside and slipping the headphones onto his head to cover his ears, he switched on the tape and listened for a moment, Ringo watching for his reaction as she bit her lip.

"Slow Ride by Foghat?" He asked, she nodded her head eagerly, impressed that he knew. "It's a good song, you've been redeemed."

She smiled softly, taking the Walkman when he handed it back to her and placing it down on her bed.

"Ass-kicker," he added, and their laughter started again.

"Steve?" Nancy's voice flooded through after she opened her door to find her boyfriend and cousin laughing together. "What are you *doing* in here?"

"And that's my cue," Ringo gripped her bag, sliding the straps onto her shoulders and moving towards the door, her eyes making contact with Steve's as she shut the door.

Ringo carefully, but quickly, slithered down the stairs after realising Mike wasn't in his room. She successfully dodged the step she knew to have a creak, and sighed in relief upon noticing Ted and Karen engrossed in the television. Or rather, Ted was, while Karen knitted.

Upon opening the door to the basement and walking down to the bottom of the steps to confirm her suspicions, Ringo cursed under her breath at the realisation.

Mike was already gone.

Ringo was a nervous wreck in the basement, biting her nails and pacing the floor so hard her feet hurt. She debated with herself to tell

Karen, at the end of the day, Mike could have run away, or he could be in serious danger.

She told herself that when the clock would strike ten thirty, if he hadn't returned she would have to tell. As much as she didn't want to and he'd hate her for it, his safety came first.

At 10:27, just as Ringo was preparing her speech to Karen Wheeler about the reason she was in the basement for a half hour and hadn't noticed Mike's obvious absence, the door to the basement scraped open.

She sighed in relief at hearing the flurry of pre-teen feet head down towards the basement. The second Ringo spotted Dustin's head of curly hair, she gasped in absolute relief.

"I'm going to personally beat each and every single one of you with a goddamn banana!" She ranted as they started to flood down.

"A banana?" Dustin asked in confusion.

"Well I don't want to *hurt* you, plus you can eat it after I beat you with it for some potassium, maybe it'll make you *smarter*," she glared at each and every individual as they stepped past.

"Ringo, thank god," Mike sighed at the sight of her, his anxious tone making her alert. "We need your help!"

"With w-" her question was completely cut off by the sight of a girl following after Mike.

She was small, with a buzzed head and a giant sweater adorning her body. The girl was staring at Ringo with eyes that reminded her of a doe in headlights, absolutely terrified.

"Who's this?" She demanded, inspecting her carefully.

"We went looking for Will, and we *found* her," Mike explained, marching up to his cousin and hoping she would have the solution.

"What do you mean *found*? Like literally found or like you found your inner peace?" She gushed, tense from each of the boys frantic natures.

"We *found* her Ringo! In the woods!" Mike ranted at her, scaring the girl even further.

"Hey it's okay!" She soothed, crouching down to look at her at eye level. "Come on," she held her hand out, the girl jumping at her movement. The girl watched her for a moment in absolute fear, not sure of whether or not to take her hand, but deciding if it had come to it, she could protect herself.

Ringo clasped her hand gently and led her towards the couch in the corner, urging her to sit down. The girl watched with terror stricken eyes as Ringo moved to lift the blanket draped around the back of the couch, and wrapped it around her, hoping to calm her shivers.

After a moment, she turned to the boys in question, who stood sheepishly digging their toes into the carpet.

"I want to know *everything*."

I hope everyone liked this chapter! Thanks to everyone who read!

harleyquinn87 - That's so encouraging to hear! Thanks so much!
x

candy95 - I'm so glad to hear that! I hope you continue to like it!
3

4. Spasm

After the boys had explained to Ringo they legitimately had found a young girl in the woods, dressed as such, she was once again pacing the floor, trying to decide what to do.

While she did this, the boys were busy nosily asking her about every little thing that came to their head.

"Where's your hair? Do you have *cancer*?" Dustin asked, causing the eldest of the group to whirl around with wide eyes.

"What the hell, Dustin! Shut up!" She scolded him, which he recoiled sheepishly at.

"Did you run away?" Lucas interjected, her eyes darting between the three boys each time one asked a question.

"We can't tell your mom, because then she'll know you were out of the house," Ringo muttered to herself, wringing her hands. "*But* on the other hand, she could probably get her some help."

"Are you in some kind of trouble?" Mike ignored his cousins rambling.

"Is that *blood*?" Lucas gasped.

"Blood?!" Ringo shouted, turning and shoving the boys aside to look at her. "Oh my god blood, what if she's a fugitive? You can't trust kids these days you know? I read in the news about this boy who killed his family. *Oh my god*, what if we're harbouring a murderer?!"

"Stop it!" Mike hit Ringo's bicep, "you're freaking her out!"

"But *I'm* freaked out!" Ringo hit him back, half as hard as he hit her.

"I bet she's deaf!" Dustin called, leaning forward to prove his theory and smack his hands. When she recoiled, he leaned back and looked to the rest of the group, "okay, not deaf."

"Okay, that's enough, all right?" Mike cut everyone off, taking over as

leader of the group. "She's just scared, and cold."

Mike rushed over to the laundry basket next to the washing machine, while Ringo felt guilty for her freak out.

"Oh my god, you're probably hungry, I'll go get something!" She gushed, running off towards the stairs and taking two at a time.

"She's not a stray cat, Ringo!" Mike called to her, carrying over a handful of clothes towards the girl left on the couch. "These are clean clothes."

Ringo half-ran into the kitchen, bumping into Karen who just rounded the corner to leave. They met head on, Ringo gasping in shock.

"Sorry! I'm so sorry!" She gushed hurriedly, rounding around her and heading straight for the cupboards.

"Why are you in such a rush?" She asked, full of suspicion as the teenager pulled out a bag of chips.

"A bet with Mike!" She shot out, running back past her and hoping she bought the excuse.

When she was in the basement again, she was out of breath from how quickly she moved, handing the bag of chips towards Mike.

"I thought you were going to get *real* food," he huffed, Dustin taking the bag and ripping it open, grabbing a handful for himself.

"You know I can't cook, Mike," she narrowed her eyes at him in a glare, noting the absence of a certain someone in the room. "Hey, where is she?"

"In the bathroom, getting changed."

"Can't cook, can't drive, Jesus Ringo what *can* you do?" Dustin joked, directing her glare to him.

"I can hang you by your feet until the blood rushes to your head and you get an aneurysm and die," she smiled sweetly, tilting her head to

the side. His eyes were suddenly wide with fright.

"...don't forget she hasn't got a job or a boyfriend either," Lucas chimed in, prompting Ringo to lift the cushion from the couch and whack him with it until he cried out for her to stop.

"As I was saying, there's something clearly wrong with her, she tried to get naked in front of us," Lucas' tone dropped to a serious one.

"Yes, there's something clearly wrong if a girl wanted to get naked in front of you," Ringo joked, chuckling to herself until Mike's facial expression made her stop abruptly.

"Ringo, she went like this," Dustin mimicked her pulling a shirt over his head.

"Maybe she escaped from Pennhurst," Lucas suggested, "the nuthouse in Kerley county."

"Got a lot of family there?" Dustin asked.

"Bite me. Seriously though, think about it. That would explain her shaved hair and why she's so crazy."

"Stop calling her crazy," Ringo rolled her eyes, "maybe she grew up with nudists and that was normal for her."

"And the shaved head?"

"Maybe she... had lice?"

"She's an escapee, that's the point," Lucas continued, "she's probably a psycho, like Ringo said. We should've never brought her here!"

"That I agree with," Ringo sighed, "you should have taken her to a doctor, she could have came from the hospital. Or at least to the police station."

"I think we should tell Mrs Wheeler," Dustin suggested, feeling nervous all of a sudden.

"I second that," Lucas added.

"I third that." Ringo's statement caused Mike to look at her with an agape mouth, clearly feeling somewhat betrayed.

"Ringo! We weren't supposed to be out tonight, remember?"

"Then, I'll say that I found her. I'll say that I wanted to help so I snuck out to join the search party and found her," Ringo sighed at the thought of the impending punishment.

"No, Ringo, we can't let you do that," Mike refused. "Besides, even if you did, our house would become Alcatraz for all of us. Then we'll never find Will."

"Alright, how about this," Ringo scraped her hand through her hair, thinking deeply about her next words. "We let her stay here tonight, and in the morning she'll sneak around outside and ring the doorbell. I'll answer it, and get Karen and she'll know what to do."

"I agree," Mike nodded his head, "and tomorrow night, we go back out and this time we find Will."

"And I'll help you. Make sure you don't bring back another strange kid."

After Dustin and Lucas left, Ringo and Mike helped the girl settle into the pillow fort in the basement, making sure she had a sleeping bag, water and plenty of blankets.

"Hey," Mike started suddenly, "We never asked your name."

The girl, instead of answering, held her arm out and pulled up her sleeve to reveal a number tattooed into her arm.

"What the fuck?" Ringo swore, inspecting it closely.

"Is that real?" Mike joined in, he moved to touch it, but she snatched her arm back before he could.

"Oh my god," Ringo whispered to Mike, "what if she's from a concentration camp?"

Mike reared around to look at his cousin with dead eyes, "a

concentration camp, Ringo? In the 80s? In America?"

"I know it's stupid but like what if there's some kind of revamped one over here! Like she's got the hair, she's scared and frightened and clearly escaped from somewhere, and now she's got a number tattooed on her skin!"

Her theory didn't sound as ludicrous as it first did, but Mike still brushed it off. After all, this was Hawkins, Indiana. Nothing ever happened here, they were completely safe. Well, that was, before Will disappeared anyway.

After Mike and Ringo had sussed out of her that her *name* was in fact the number on her arm - Eleven, Ringo yawned tiredly and stood up, ready to return to her bed.

"Goodnight sweetheart," she smiled warmly at her, Eleven nodding softly as the elder girl retreated back to her room, having had enough for one night.

At breakfast the next morning, as Mike tried to subtly slip two of his Eggos into his pockets for the girl in the basement, Ringo slipped over to murmur quietly.

"After breakfast, go downstairs and tell her what to do so I can be here to answer the door," Ringo whispered to him, Mike nodding eagerly.

After breakfast though however, twenty minutes had passed, and Ringo could no longer stall Mrs Wheeler before she had to go to school. Mike was nowhere to be seen, and there was no small, lost girl at the door.

"Ringo, it's time to go, come on," Karen called, as the teenager slowly trudged downstairs, expecting the door bell to be rang at any minute.

"Oh, you know I think I forgot to brush my teeth!" She called out, slapping her head dumbly before turning back to run upstairs.

"No you didn't, I was in the bathroom with you," Nancy replied, confused by her cousins strange behaviour.

"Right," Ringo responded dumbly, giving up and finally trailing back downstairs, towards the front door. "Why isn't Mike coming?"

"He wanted to ride his bike to school today," Karen responded, ushering the two girls out of the door before they were completely late, Nancy getting anxious with the approaching time.

"So Justin Kercher comes up to me the other day, right," Jessica was explaining as the two walked down the hallway, Ringo nodding her head to show that she was listening. "And he asks me, 'so, where are you from?' So I said 'Falls Street', and he says 'no, where are you *from*?' I'm confused as heck at this point, I tell him 'Hawkins, I've always lived here', and I shit you not, Ringo, he says 'I mean where are you from, *originally*?'"

"Oh for god's sake," Ringo rolled her eyes at the stupidity of it.

"Right! He thinks that because my skin tone is darker that I'm clearly not from America, like, hello! Your skin tone is white you're clearly not from America either!"

Ringo laughed at her statement, agreeing completely. She was well aware of the racial undercurrent in the small town, and in the time she had known Jessica, had witnessed it take form in different ways. A lot of the time, it was plain stupidity. Ringo had wanted to fight them on her behalf every time, but Jessica had always held her back, responded with a cool, yet informative and directed insult, and walked along.

"Oh god, that's depressing," she heard a voice from the group they were about to pass by say, for a moment, Jessica and Ringo thought they were talking to them. But upon turning, she saw that it was Steve Harrington and his Breakfast Club-esque group.

She followed their eye line, and noticed it was directed at Jonathan Byers, who was pinning up posters displaying Will's face. Ringo's heart broke at the sight, she hadn't seen the teenager since the day before Will had disappeared.

"Should we say something?" She heard Nancy's sweet voice suggest.

"I don't think he speaks," Carol jibed.

"How much do you want to bet he killed him?" Tommy sneered, Ringo and Jessica shared a look, a look that showed they were ready to fight.

"Shut up," Steve cut them off, hitting his arm.

Without further pause, Ringo shoved through the two boys roughly, able to push Tommy against the wall from the shove and Steve sideways as they had been taken off guard.

"Wow, Tommy," she turned around with narrowed eyes. "Might wanna lay off the steroids, shoulders are getting a bit big. Some of us are trying to walk here."

"This bitch again?" Carol joined in, leaning off the wall and giving her a once over, eyes filled with judgement as they perpetually did.

"Yeah, this bitch, got a problem, toots?" Jessica replied and stepped up, coming to Ringo's side and her aid. They stood aside each other, staring Carol down. Both of them were about a head taller than the small ginger, and she knew it. Almost instantly, she backed down with a roll of her eyes and moved to be by her boyfriend.

"We're going to go offer to help Jonathan, because we aren't cliché assholes who think our looks are going to get us anywhere further in life than peaking in high school," Ringo eyed them all, daring one of them to speak back to her. "Nancy, are you coming?"

Nancy stuttered, looking back and forth between her cousin and the group she had so desperately wanted to be friends with since the start of her high school experience. Each person she looked at was seething in anger - Jessica and Ringo out of empathy and Carol, Tommy and Steve out of insult.

"I-I don't want to crowd him, you two go ahead, I'll talk to him later," Nancy had settled on, receiving a disappointed look from her cousin.

"Wow, I guess Mike was right," she scoffed. "He really is changing you."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Steve cut in, stepping forward.

Ringo ignored him, turning around and marching towards Jonathan. Jessica looked around at the faces of the remaining group with a small smile, completely proud of her best friend, before she turned to join her.

Jessica hung back a little, she had never spoken to Jonathan in her life and didn't want to intrude.

"Hey," Ringo greeted with a soft voice, completely contradicting her stance from minutes ago towards the other group.

Jonathan looked up as he stuck a thumbtack through the hand-made posters of Will, forcing a smile that was completely overshadowed by his sad eyes.

"Hey," he replied back, voice low.

"I don't really know what to say at a time like this, but I want you to know that if you need anything at all," she reached out and squeezed his arm gently for reassurance, "I have hiking boots and a flashlight, if you need help looking. And a group of really upset pre-teens who would be more than happy to help find their friend."

"Thanks, Ringo," he nodded his head, eyes falling to the floor before his gaze lifted again, focusing on something behind her. She followed his eyes to see that he was staring towards Nancy, who stood looking extremely guilty, next to the rest of the group who openly watched him like a hawk.

"Nancy would have come over too," Ringo tried to lie for her cousin, even though she hated her at that moment. "She just didn't want to seem intrusive or like she was prying."

"She wouldn't have been, but it's okay," he replied, embarrassed that he had been caught looking. The bell rang suddenly, catching them both off guard and signalling the end of the conversation.

"Call the house if you need to talk or need anything, okay?" She urged, starting to walk backwards. He settled for a nod of his head, waving goodbye and looking back to the poster once more.

While everyone had begun to filter out of the hallway, Nancy had remained, ignoring the encouragements of her boyfriend to move along to class. As Ringo walked past, she shook her head in disappointment at her.

Nancy waited for a moment, fiddling fearfully with her bag straps before sighing and moving forward, ready to speak to Jonathan now that the hallway was empty and she was alone. But just as she moved, he had turned and eagerly rushed out of the school exit, leaving her in the hallway completely alone.

Dinner had been an awkward debacle, with Nancy desperate to talk to Ringo but being completely avoided, and Ringo desperate to talk to Mike, but being completely avoided.

She was wedged in between Lucas and Dustin at the dinner table, the room too quiet for her to ask what happened the girl in the basement.

"So," Nancy started, Ringo rolled her eyes already, knowing this would be yet another lie so she could sneak out with Steve. "There's this special assembly thing tonight for Will at the school field. Barb's driving."

"Why am I only hearing about this now?" Karen asked suspiciously.

"I thought you knew!"

"I told you I don't want you going out after dark until Will is found-"

"I know, I know, but it'd be super weird if I'm not there," Nancy sweet talked. Ringo shook her head in disgust once again, she couldn't believe that her cousin would use Will's disappearance to her advantage.

"Wow," she couldn't help herself but say, catching the attention of all at the table. Nancy looked at her with desperate eyes, silently pleading with her not to tell.

"What, Ringo?" Karen turned to her.

"This is just such great meatloaf!" She played off, dangling a piece on

her fork into the air with a grin on her face.

"Just be back by ten, okay?" She sighed, giving in to the whims of her eldest daughter, Nancy nodding eagerly. "Take Ringo and the boys too."

"No!" All four of them - Mike, Ringo, Lucas and Dustin rang out at the exact same time.

"Don't you think you should be there? For Will?" She asked in confusion, "And Ringo, do you have a problem with Barb? You never want to hang out with Nancy when she's there."

Ringo sighed, wracking her brains for an excuse when all of a sudden, Mike had choked on his milk, spitting a gulp of it back into the glass. At the sound of a creak behind them, Nancy, Karen and Ringo turned to look, but were distracted by the sound of Dustin banging his fists on the table.

"Sorry, spasm," he explained.

After dinner, while drying the dishes, Ringo had finally rounded Mike into the corner to ask about Eleven.

"What the hell, Mike? What happened this morning? I checked the basement earlier and she's gone!" She whisper-shouted at him, while he looked around anxiously for his listening mother or sister.

"Calm down! I took the day off and took her to the police station. Turns out... she lives in an orphanage," he lied through his teeth, hating himself for it. He knew that Ringo wanted to help, but the truth was, as immature as she could be - she was still mature enough to try to get help for Eleven, which is exactly what she didn't want or need.

Ringo would try to take her to a hospital or to the police, and then they'd never see her again.

"Oh," she murmured, sadly, wishing she could have said goodbye, "well I hope she's okay."

After another period of avoiding Nancy completely, just like she had

cornered Mike, her cousin cornered her in their bedroom.

"Can you stop avoiding me, Ringo?!" Nancy ranted, shutting the door behind her to stop her mother from hearing.

"Jesus Christ, you're so desperate for attention that you actually give a shit if I talk to you or not," Ringo threw her hands up in the air in frustration, Nancy's mouth falling in offence.

"That is not fair! I *wanted* to talk to Jonathan, but I didn't know what to say to him!"

"Oh, bullshit! You and I both know you didn't because you're *cool* now, and didn't want your bitch friends and asshole boyfriend to see you talking to someone they deem unimportant!"

"Can you get over your hatred of Steve for *five* seconds? He's not like Tommy and Carol, if you weren't so self obsessed you'd see that!" Nancy was beginning to shout back now, the angriest the two had ever been at each other.

"If he's friends with them, he's just as bad as them, kiddo! Self obsessed? I'm the only one in that asshole school who actually cares about people other than myself!" Nancy rolled her eyes at this response, turning away and balling her hands into fists so she could calm down.

The room was silent for a few minutes, until Nancy had turned around and let out a soft sigh.

"I'm sorry, okay? The truth is, I was too scared to approach Jonathan," she revealed, sitting down on the cot, next to Ringo. "I really like Steve, I don't want him to leave me."

"If you don't want him to leave you for being yourself, Nancy, then you're letting yourself down," she sighed, wrapping her arm around her cousin and resting her head against her shoulder. "You're a pretty awesome person, you know? Stop trying to make yourself less than that to appease some stupid guy."

"I know," Nancy appeased her by not arguing, resting her cheek against the top of her head. "Can you come with me tonight?"

"Where are you going?"

"A party at Steve's..."

Ringo exhaled, letting go of Nancy and moving away from her.

"Just come, have some fun, have a few drinks, everyone loves drunk Ringo!" She pressed, a hopeful smile on her face. "I really want you two to get along. I need you there, you and Barb are my support system."

Ringo pretended to mull it over, tilting her head to the side and smirking.

"You had me at 'drinks'."

I get so excited to write this that I'm banging out a chapter a day right now my god

harleyquinn87 - I'm so happy to hear that! I want her to feel like a natural character and not like I'm forcing her into the show!

PondLake - ahhHHH I'M EXCITED TOO THEN. There wasn't any specific reasoning behind it, Steve just liked how she stood up to him and then felt a little bad for her on her first day, which I think ties in with his characterisation in season one where he's equal parts asshole to equal parts sweetheart :)

5. Shotgun

RINGO WAS STARING OUT OF THE CAR WINDOW IN BOREDOM, of course that was until Nancy had forced Barb to pull over. She sat up in the back seat, wondering why.

"His house is three blocks away, why are we stopping here?" Barb looked at her friend as if she was ridiculous.

"His what?! I am NOT walking three blocks in these goddamn boots, Nancy you better be dead or dying because I know you're not making me walk three blocks," Ringo called from the back seat with a groan. Nancy pulled down the mirror to quickly check her make up, chuckling at her friend's reactions.

"We can't park in the driveway, the neighbours will see!" She protested. But Ringo did not find this amusing as her cousin did.

"You think I give a shit? Knowing Harrington, his driveway probably has more cars in it than a car depot," Ringo continued, rolling her eyes at her cousins whims.

"This is ridiculous, I'll just drop you off," Barb shook her head, turning to restart the engine.

"If she's not going I'm not going," Ringo added.

"No, come on guys!" Nancy became antsy at their threats of backing out. "You promised you'd come! We're all gonna have a great time! And Ringo, you'd never turn down free booze."

"He just wants to get in your pants, Nancy," Barb informed her. The girl shook her head, clearly in denial, eliciting a pitiful sigh from the other two. "He invited you over... his parents aren't home... come on, you are not this stupid!"

"Okay, okay," Ringo interjected, leaning forward so her face was in the middle of the seats. "Nancy, he's going to try to have sex with you tonight, that's a given. And it's not stupid if you go along with it, you're a big girl and you have control over your own body. However

it is stupid if you don't want to do it, and just go along with it anyway for his sake. But if you do have sex with him, just go into it with the knowledge that there is a chance he'll back off after you do, okay?"

Nancy shook her head again, stammering over her words, refusing to believe her friends and passing them off as paranoid. Neither Barb, nor Ringo, trusted Steve. But they didn't know him like Nancy did.

"Guys, it's not like that! Tommy and Carol are gonna be there." This news prompted Ringo to lean back in her seat and sigh, hoping the alcohol would be enough to dumb down her brain so she wouldn't have to listen to them.

"Tommy and Carol have been having sex since like seventh grade," Barb laughed. "It'll probably just be like one big orgy."

"Alright, well you both can be like my guardian angels, okay? And stop me from doing anything," she suggested, removing her sweater to change into her 'party' shirt. "Make sure I don't get drunk and do anything stupid."

"Sweetie, I'll be one getting drunk and doing something stupid," Ringo raised her brows informatively. "But if he lays a hand on you, knowing you're not consenting, give me a holler and I'll break my foot off of his ass."

"Thanks, Ringo," she turned her head and smiled sweetly at the girl in the back, who sighed dejectedly - knowing she was probably going to get her heart broken soon enough.

"There better be cute guys here," she huffed as they got out of the car and began their walk.

Barb and Nancy approached Steve Harrington's front door, the distant sound of a rock song booming in the background. Ringo was close behind, walking ever so much slower because of the agony her feet were in. She cursed Nancy a million times over in her head for making her walk to save her reputation with Steve's random ass neighbours.

Taking one glance over his house, she let out a scoff.

"I knew he was rich," she muttered under her breath, thanking God when she finally reached the entrance just as Nancy rang the door bell.

A few moments later, the two front doors opened to reveal a grinning Steve Harrington behind them, looking back and forth between Barb and Nancy.

"Hello ladies," he greeted, until his gaze drifted to the blonde standing a few feet behind them. "And Ringo." His tone had dropped, clearly unaware that Nancy had invited her. He shot his girlfriend a look, which she returned with one of her own.

"Well," he moved back and held his arm out. "Come on in."

As they trailed inside, he waited until Ringo passed by so he could shut the doors. Their eyes met as she stepped inside, full of tension and loathing from the events earlier that day.

"You better have alcohol," she muttered, kicking off her shoes uncaringly and tossing them to the side of the front door, choosing to walk around bare foot.

"Yeah, be careful I don't poison your cup," he retorted, lowering his voice so Nancy couldn't hear their bickering.

"Good, then it'll get me out of having to be here!" She spit in return, following after the girls into the vast expanse of a room he called a kitchen.

"Woah," Ringo began, turning around on her feet, "are we early? Where is everyone?"

"It's just us, and Tommy and Carol are out by the pool."

"Are you serious?" She hissed. "I thought this was a party?"

"It was until you came," he whispered under his breath, but she heard it anyway, and glared in response.

After a while, they had all settled into deck chairs by the pool. Ringo had already guzzled two cans of beers - she had drank quickly, trying to get to the drunk euphoria she longed for, and was now sitting with her third.

"I can't believe you have a pool," Ringo called out, after Nancy had gestured to her non-verbally to begin talking to Steve.

"Why?" Carol was the one to respond before Steve could, "you're from Florida, what kind of Floridian doesn't have a pool?"

Ringo, desperate to push Carol's crude manner aside, made a joke of it instead.

"The only thing I have in my back yard is a clothing line and my creepy, perverted neighbour."

Steve let out a chuckle at her words, which she appreciated. Tommy and Carol had laughed too, but theirs felt more directed at her than laughing at what she actually said.

"So, what'd you do to get shipped off to Indiana?" Tommy asked pryingly, leaning back in his deck chair with Carol snuggled in his lap.

"I'd rather not say," she scrunched her nose up, wanting to avoid that topic for the rest of her life.

"Must have been pretty bad. I've done a lot of things to piss my parents off but they've never actually wanted to get rid of me."

Feeling awkward, she raised her eyebrows dis-interestingly and gestured to her beer can, although it wasn't empty, before getting up and heading towards the kitchen - pretending to get another one.

As soon as she was alone, she leaned back against the counter and took a breath, running her hands through her hair in agitation.

She didn't hear footsteps coming, so when a figure rounded in from the back entrance to the pool, she jumped on the spot. Steve looked at her with furrowed eyebrows, instantly noticing her demeanour.

"You okay?" He asked, causing her cheeks to redden in embarrassment that she had been caught at a moment of weakness.

"Yeah!" She said, her tone too high to be meaningful. She turned around and opened the fridge door, reaching for a beer and holding it up. "Just getting a beer."

"Look," he began, and she sighed, not wanting to participate in the coming conversation. "I just wanted to apologise, okay? For what Tommy and Carol said at school today."

"It's not me they were being offensive towards, so," she crossed her arms, her lips pursed and her eyes looking down at her feet.

"Well then, I'll apologise for what they said just now. They're not dumb, they know they're being offensive. They were messing with you and I'm sorry."

Her head tilted up to look at his expression, judging how genuine he was being. When she couldn't sense any maliciousness behind it, she nodded her head in acceptance.

"This is the part where you apologise now, too," he added awkwardly, scratching the back of his neck. "For what you said earlier about us? Not going anywhere past high school?"

"No, I meant that," she refused stubbornly, her softened expression hardening once more.

"That was kinda rude, don't you think? I didn't even say anything about Jonathan but you dragged me into it."

"Your friends are a reflection of you, Steve. If you spend time around people like that, you're one of those people."

He let out a laugh, "you're ridiculous, you know that? I'm not going to stop being friends with people I've known since second grade because they made one mean joke."

"One joke? Every time I've been in the same room as them, they've been malicious towards someone else. If you're still friends out of sentimentality, fine. But you putting up with what they say and do

without checking them, makes you part of the problem."

His eyes were narrowed by the end of her speech, not out of anger but out of thought. He was really listening to what she was saying, his brain running through recent months with his friends where they had made someone else the butt of their joke. Admittedly, the majority of the time, he had joined in.

"Alright, alright, can we call a truce?" He suggested, his lips lifting up into a smirk as he held his hand out for her to shake.

She eyed it carefully, thinking of Nancy as she wrapped her hand around his and shook it.

"Truce."

"Now lets go back outside, ass kicker," he nodded his head to the side, grinning widely in amusement at the use of her newfound nickname.

She rolled her eyes playfully and shoved him lightly, then walked by his side as they headed out to his pool again.

A half hour or so had passed, and Ringo was well through her tipsy stage. She barely even felt the cold air drift over her bare legs, or felt regret for wearing a skirt in the first place.

While Tommy and Carol messed around childishly next to the pool, Steve had picked up a beer and shotgunned it.

Barb, Nancy and Ringo all watched as he lifted the cut hole to his lips and drank it down in a few seconds, tossing he can aside and sitting back down on his chair, which was between Nancy's and Ringo's.

Ringo noted Barb had rolled her eyes, and chuckled. Barb was never going to be the party type, she was like a mom that had tagged along and unapproved of everything going on.

"Is that supposed to impress me?" Nancy laughed, watching him with a smile as he lit up a cigarette and took a drag.

"You're not?" He asked, following along with it.

"You are a cliché, you do realise that?"

"Seconded," Ringo called out, laying flat on her deck chair, she reached her hand over towards Steve and gestured for his lit cigarette. He gave it to her, and watched in surprise as she lifted it to her lips and took a drag of her own before handing it back.

Deciding not to comment on it, he looked back to Nancy.

"You are a cliché with your grades and band practice."

"I'm so not in band!"

"I'm so not in band!" Ringo mimicked her, making her voice really high and screwing up her face.

"Ringo's the cliché!" She held her hand out, pointing to her cousin eagerly.

"No I'm not," she laughed, taking the cigarette Steve had offered her again, repeatedly they passed it back and forth, sharing the entire thing between them.

"She's really not," Steve agreed, looking back to his girlfriend with a smile. "She looks rich, but apparently isn't rich, and looks sweet, but then threatens to cut your balls off, and dresses like she's a bubblegum princess, but listens to rock music. Ringo isn't a cliché."

Nancy's eyes narrowed, wondering when her boyfriend had learned so much information about her cousin.

"But here, party girl," he reached into the cooler by his side and picked up a beer, "if you're not a cliché either, show us how it's done."

Spurred on by his evaluation of Ringo, she agreed to it, taking the beer can from his hand.

"You gotta make a little hole right in the-" Steve offered to help, but she turned around and stood up from her chair, brushing him off.

"I got it!" She cut him off.

"Yes, queen!" Ringo called drunkenly. "You show him, my feminist flower pot!"

Nancy pierced a hole, shockingly it didn't spray beer everywhere, and proceeded to follow through and drink the entire thing, egged on by the chorus of 'chug!' from everyone. Except Barbara, who watched in absolute disapproval.

She gave Ringo a 'what the hell' look, annoyed that she too, had encouraged it. Ringo rolled her eyes in response, annoyed at Barb's attitude.

Perhaps it was her drunken haze, but Barb's standoffish nature and the way in which she sat judging everyones actions was starting to brush her the wrong way. Multiple times she had considered taking Barb aside and telling her simply that she was never going to live her life being so concerned about everyone else's.

"I want to try!" Ringo squealed happily, holding her arms in the air with a wide grin.

"Not a chance, ass kicker," Steve grinned and shook his head.

"Ringo, you've had way too much," Nancy rejected her, Ringo dropped her arms and pouted like a child. She then looked towards Barb, and noticed her expression.

"Barb, you wanna try?" She offered, holding another can out to her.

"No, I don't want to," she refused.

"Come on," her friend wouldn't listen, Nancy and Steve egging her on. Ringo's eyebrows furrowed as she watched the encounter.

"If she doesn't want to, she doesn't want to. Back off, you fornicators," she threw her hand out, breaking into giggles afterward at her choice of words.

After further encouragement, ignoring both Barb and Ringo, Nancy had convinced her to try it.

Unfortunately for Barb, the blade she attempted to slit the can with

had slipped and slit her hand instead.

After Barb trailed inside to go to the bathroom and clean up, the rest of the party attendants had all ended up in the pool - with Steve and Tommy jumping in, and Carol and Nancy being pushed.

After a few minutes of splashing and laughing, Steve headed towards the ladder and exited the pool, heading for the blonde who had yet to join them.

"Come on, drunkard," he sneaked up to her, ready to grab her and toss her into the water as well. However upon reaching her, he noticed that she had completely fallen asleep in the last few minutes, snoozing softly.

"Nancy," he called, looking over briefly towards the other teenager, who swayed gracefully through the water to get to the ladder as well. "Ringo's asleep"

"Oh crap," she cursed, climbing out and looking her over.

"If you want, I can lift her into the living room and she can sleep on the couch until you're leaving?" He offered, Nancy smiling gratefully, but also wondering when that would be - now that Ringo was asleep and Barb was MIA.

"That would be great, thanks Steve."

He shoved his wet hair out of his face and his sleeves up his arms, before slipping his forearms beneath her body and ever so gently lifting her up. Steve barely felt her weight from his acquired basketball muscles.

Taking careful steps, he carried her inside into the living room, and settled her down on the couch. For a moment, while they were alone, he remarked over her sleeping expression. She appeared so much less stressed and angry while she was asleep, almost even cute. Absently, he brushed the stray locks of hair out of her face.

Steve blinked rapidly, realising he was being creepy by staring at her and decided to leave, ultimately to find Nancy.

When next she woke, she was being shaken by none other than her darling cousin. Ringo opened her eyes blearily to see her standing above her, in a completely strange environment.

"Where the fuck am I?" She hissed, her words slurring and her head pounding.

"We're at Steve's, you fell asleep, come on it's time to go," Nancy whispered, gesturing for her to stand up.

"What time is it?" She asked, clutching her head. Her mouth felt dry, but her body felt worse.

"It's 1am," she told her, helping her stand up. "We have to walk home, Barb left hours ago. Mom is going to kill us."

"Walk?" Ringo hissed, narrowing her eyes. "Not a fucking chance."

With a newfound energy, she marched into the hallway and headed towards the stairs, ready to bound up the steps and half-drag Steve Harrington down to his car so he could give the girls a ride home.

"No, Ringo, please don't," Nancy grabbed her hand and dragged her back. Ringo tried to shove her hand off, until she noticed the desperate look in her eyes, and the underlying sadness on her facial features. "He's sleeping and I just... please."

"Okay?" She agreed, watching Nancy carefully as she stepped back down and grabbed her boots, "tell me what happened on the walk home, okay?"

"I will," Nancy agreed, the two girls leaving through the back entrance. "God, you absolutely reek of beer."

Thanks for reading!

candy95 - You're absolutely right, Ringo will be more involved in the Nancy/Jonathan/Steve group, rather than the kids. I've seen a couple of stories where the lead follows the younger group, so I thought it would be interesting to see her with the others instead.

*harleyquinn87 - Your reviews are soooo uplifting and inspiring,
thank you so much from the bottom of my heart!*

6. Back Seat

It was another hour before they had arrived home on foot, completed with Ringo stopping their journey once to physically cry. She had told Nancy that it was all down to her shoes pinching her feet like before, but there was a sadness in her eyes that her cousin picked up on. It made her curious about what Ringo could possibly have to be so upset about, and if something had happened today or if the alcohol had brought it out in her.

Nancy had teared up herself when relaying the details of the last few hours to Ringo, completely embarrassed to reveal that Steve had been cold after they had lay together, and how much she regretted it.

Ringo had wrapped her arm securely around Nancy and held her close as they walked, listening to every word she said.

"Nancy, this isn't on you at all," Ringo murmured, resting her cheek against the top of the smaller girl's head.

"But you and Barb warned me this would happen, that he would use me and I didn't listen," she cried into her shoulder blade, thanking god it was dark out and the streets were empty.

"It doesn't matter, he *knew* that you expected more and if he wants nothing more to do with you then he should have relayed that to you before having sex with you," Ringo argued back softly, squeezing her tightly. "And hey, who knows, maybe he'll call tomorrow, you know? Maybe he isn't a dickhead and maybe he won't completely bail."

Nancy shook her head in disbelief, but stayed quiet nonetheless.

They sighed collectively in relief when the Wheeler house came into view, but were also filled with the sudden fear that they would be punished for being out four hours past curfew.

Nancy opened the door gently, Ringo slipping quietly in behind her. They attempted to be as silent as possible but to no avail, as Karen was already awake and waiting for them, revealing herself by turning the lights on.

"Jesus, you scared me," Nancy gasped.

"Oh, I scared *you*?" Karen spit back, eyes wide with anger.

"I know, we should have called."

"Where have you two been?" She talked loudly, but not loud enough to wake her other children asleep upstairs. "We agreed on ten!"

"After the assembly, some people wanted to go get something to eat," Nancy made up an excuse, as she always did when talking to her mother lately. "I didn't think it'd be a big deal."

It was a lie and Mrs Wheeler knew it, all she had to do was take note of both of their tearstained cheeks, Ringo's complete silence and the distinct smell of beer.

"What, you didn't think to call and let me know? With everything that's been going on?!"

"We didn't realise how late it was, Mrs Wheeler," Ringo cut in, her voice tiny, "I'm really sorry."

"I'm sorry, mom, what more do you want?" Nancy huffed, moving off towards the stairs to make yet another dramatic exit.

"Wait," she stopped her, putting her hand out, "who's sweatshirt is that?"

Ringo's eyes widened dramatically and Nancy completely froze up.

"Steve's..." she murmured quietly.

"Steve's," her mother repeated.

"Oh boy, Steve," Ringo whispered.

"So is Steve your boyfriend now?" Mrs Wheeler pressed, looking to her with a raised eyebrow for an answer.

"What? No! It was just cold so I borrowed his sweatshirt! It's no big deal."

"Ringo's in a skirt and you don't see her borrowing clothes from other guys," Nancy rolled her eyes at her mother's comment and turned to march back upstairs. "Nancy?" She began again, her voice much softer now. "You can talk to me. You can talk to me about whatever happened."

"Nothing happened."

Ringo looked down at her feet sadly, sometimes Nancy didn't realise how great her family were. She longed for a mother who would have offered to listen to her heartbreaks.

Karen let out a small sigh when Nancy continued on upstairs, turning around to Ringo, who was still stood at the bottom.

"Look, Ringo," she began, taking a few steps down to be at eye-level. "We welcomed you into this family with open arms. But I'm not going to let you get my daughter into the same trouble you got into."

Ringo recoiled at her words, shame and hurt filling her body and watering her eyes. She nodded her head quickly, trying to hold back another sob until she was away from her prying eyes and rushing upstairs and straight into the bathroom, to cry her heart out.

The next day, school dragged on dreadfully.

Ringo was stood at her locker, shuffling through her books to retrieve her notebook for the next class. By chance, her eyes caught onto Nancy down at the end of the hall, at her own locker.

Nancy wasn't alone of course, she was sharing a kiss with Steve. Ringo smiled at the sight, thankful that Nancy hadn't been used and dumped like she so feared she was going to be. Her smile began to fade as her sadness set in, and she wished suddenly that she had someone who would treat her like she wasn't worthless, too.

"Hey, Ringo," a voice sounded from beside her, startling her enough to jump.

"Oh, hey Daniel," she greeted politely, closing her backpack and shutting the locker door, leaning against it to look at him.

"So, this is really forward," he made a funny face, causing her to chuckle, "but I'd like to get to know you better. How about we go see a movie tonight? Your choice?"

Ringo would have declined, really. If she hadn't seen Steve and Nancy just moments before that, and hadn't been egged on by her slight, underlying jealousy of her cousin.

"Sure, that sounds great," she smiled brightly, causing him to beam in return.

"Awesome. You're staying at the Wheelers, right?"

"I am, yes."

"Pick you up around eight?"

"I'll see you then," she waved as he started to back away, a sense of hope renewed in her.

"Did my ears just fail me, or are you going on a date with Daniel Ashford?" Her best friend's voice cut in behind her, causing her to whirl around and smile excitedly.

"Yes! Isn't it great?"

"Define great," Jessica cringed.

"He's not that bad, is he?" She teased, unable to keep the smile off of her face.

"Well let me see, long haired white boy with bright blue eyes and a pretty smile," she mused, placing a hand on her friend's shoulder lightly. "Boy, you are screwed."

Later that day, the final bell had rung at last, and Ringo was heading towards the parking lot towards Steve's car so he could give her and Nancy their daily ride home.

The small smile on her lips had yet to leave, however when she approached Steve's car and noticed a scene happening, it was quick

to fall.

Jonathan was standing facing the group, his bag being tossed between Tommy and Steve carelessly.

"Hey!" She shouted, running over to the group and ready to intervene. "The fuck is going on?"

"You're right in time, Ringo," Steve surprised her by grinning as he reached into Jonathan's bag and began to rifle through it.

"What are you doing? Give him the bag back or so help me *god*-" Jonathan was trembling next to her, and she was suddenly furious at the man she thought was coming close to being her friend.

"Here we go," Steve ignored her, whipping out a pile of something she couldn't see from his bag.

"Put it back, doucheface," she threatened, moving forward to approach him.

"Oh look, Ringo, here's one of you!" He exclaimed, causing her eyebrows to furrow in frustration and confusion.

Steve handed a printed photograph towards Ringo, it was blurry and taken at night, but the setting was remarkably familiar. It took her a second to realise that the girl in the centre of the picture, who had her arms raised in the air and was grinning happily, was in fact herself.

"What is this?" She looked over to Jonathan, who looked nothing short of mortified.

Carol stepped forward and took a handful of photographs that Steve had handed to Tommy, looking them over before scoffing.

"Yeah, this isn't creepy at all!"

Ringo hated to admit, but for once she agreed with her. The situation was all too familiar for her, and her heart raced with fury - this time, directed at Jonathan.

"Why would you do this?" She asked with gritted teeth.

He shook his head lightly, swallowing harshly, it was clear he felt guilty and ashamed but at that minute, his emotions didn't matter to her.

"I was looking for my brother," he stammered, causing her to wince in disappointment. She snatched the pictures from Steve and flipped through them all, hoping that there was none of her in a revealing manner.

"No," Steve refuted, "this is called stalking."

Ringo continued to search desperately, thankfully, there were only two more where she was in the picture - one where she was smiling softly, a lit cigarette in hand, and the other taken through a window, where Steve kneeled next to her sleeping figure on the couch and was gently touching something on her face.

She lingered on this picture, wondering when it could have possibly been taken, and why Steve was doing that in the first place.

Nancy had finally arrived, much to Jonathan's horror. She watched as her group of friends were stood with Jonathan, matching expressions of judgement and disgust. To her surprise, that included Ringo.

"What's going on?" She asked curiously, looking at each of them for an answer.

"Here's the starring lady!" Tommy grinned.

"Alright, guys enough. I don't want to see these any more," Ringo tried to stop the show there, shoving the pictures back into Steve's hands and leaning against the trunk of his car, her eyes on her feet as memories swirled through her head relentlessly.

"This creep was spying on us last night," Carol ignored her, exposing him.

Nancy looked back to Jonathan for an answer, clutching her bag tighter.

"He was probably gonna save this one for later," Carol handed Nancy a photograph from her pile. Ringo saw it from the side of her eye, her stomach turning again. It was Nancy, of course. But she was in the middle of getting undressed, her bra and back on show.

"See, you can tell that he knows it was wrong," Steve teased, moving up to stand in front of Jonathan, "but man, that's the thing about perverts. It's hard wired into them, they just can't help themselves."

Steve began to rip the pictures up, letting the pieces sprinkle onto the ground before turning around and reaching for Jonathan's bag.

"We'll just have to take away his toy."

"No," Jonathan began to beg, moving forward to retrieve it himself, "please no, not the camera."

Tommy stepped up, ready to fight Jonathan off, but was ultimately stopped by Steve.

"No, no, wait man, it's okay," he smiled softly, holding out Jonathan's camera towards him. "Here you go."

Jonathan sighed in relief and stepped forward to reach for it, but Steve had played with him, and let it drop from his fingers, hitting the ground with a definitive crack.

Ringo looked away, trying to force down the pity she felt after witnessing his broken expression.

"Come on, lets go," Steve gestured towards the car, heading towards the drivers side and ready to head home.

Ringo pushed off the car, unable to help herself as she marched up to Jonathan, her finger pointed angrily at the ground beneath her.

"You might want to change your direction, next time," she seethed, "because this?" Ringo kicked the piece of ripped photograph that showcased Nancy's near-naked body. "This can ruin people's fucking lives."

"I-I'm sorry," he stuttered, face reddened with humiliation.

"I thought we could have been friends," she told him honestly, Jonathan visibly deflating at her words as she turned and began to march home, calling over her shoulder that she was walking.

"Where are you going?" Nancy asked her friend curiously, watching as she applied her lipstick in the mirror with care.

"On a date," Ringo snapped close her lipstick and smiled in the mirror, hyping herself up.

"A date?" Nancy laughed, "with who? You've been to school for like a week and you already have a date!"

"Daniel Ashford," Ringo beamed excitedly, practically bouncing on her feet.

"Daniel *Ashford*," Nancy's eyes widened, "he's like one of the most popular guys in school, Ringo!"

"I don't give a shit about that, he's cute. And he seems nice, so," Ringo fluffed her hair and tugged her coat up her arms.

"What are you going to tell mom?" Nancy followed her out of their bedroom and down the stairs.

"I told her already that I was going on a date, she was actually excited for me, maybe you should try a little honesty sometimes!" Ringo winked at Nancy, almost skipping downstairs as the time neared closer to eight.

"Well... have fun?" She offered, watching with furrowed brows as Ringo waved and rushed out the door, the sound of a horn beeping outside ringing out.

Nancy had never seen Ringo like this, so excited over meeting a boy. It confused her, but perhaps it was just a new side to her she never got to witness.

"Hi," Ringo greeted happily as she slid into his passenger seat. Daniel hummed and gave her a once-over, smirking and clearly satisfied with her appearance.

"Hey, babe. You ready to go?" He asked, she nodded eagerly as he started to reverse out of the drive.

"What movies are our options?" Ringo asked, assuming they were going to the theatre.

"The only movie playing tonight is The Shining, is that alright?" He answered, expecting her to recoil at the name.

"No, I love horror movies," she beamed, surprising him. Ringo was slightly confused that there was only a single movie playing that night, but perhaps the cinema in Hawkins simply didn't have multiple showings like her local theatre back home did.

Ringo soon realised what he meant, however, when he pulled in at the entrance of a drive-in movie park, her smile noticeably dimming. There was only one reason guys took girls to these types of showings, and it wasn't to 'get to know them'.

She tried to push that voice in her head aside, telling herself that if Steve didn't treat Nancy like that, maybe Daniel would be different from the boys in Orlando as well.

He paid for their entrance, and parked the car towards the back of the lot. The car was silent, awkwardly so, with them both shuffling to get comfortable as the film began to play.

"You want to sit in the back instead?" He offered, but she was skeptical, so he explained himself. "It's just more comfortable."

"Um, sure!" She accepted, following his lead and getting out of the car, re-entering through the back to sit there instead.

"So, how are you finding Hawkins?"

"It's a little boring," she scrunched her nose up, "but I like the people here, and I love spending time with my cousins."

"Do you miss Orlando? And your old school?"

"Not really," she looked down for a second, glad to be away from the shit show she had left.

"I have a cousin of my own that lives in Orlando as well, he goes to Richard Brady high school," at his words, Ringo completely froze, her face paled entirely.

"His name is Hank Sanders, you know him?" He continued, and her stomach began to turn in fear. She couldn't form words, just a shake of her head. "Really? Because he knows you."

Ringo reached out and grabbed the door handle, ready to leave and run away from him. It was clear by now that he knew what happened in Orlando.

"Wait!" He stopped her, gently grabbing her arm, she whipped her head around, her eyes furious as she looked at him for a response. "I just wanted to tell you that, so you know that I don't judge you."

Her eyes narrowed further in suspicion, brows scrunching together as she tried to figure out the man in the back seat with her.

"It's true, I don't care about it. Nor do I judge you for it, okay?" He looked at her with raised eyebrows, and as much as her gut told herself not to, she couldn't help but believe him.

"Okay," Ringo whispered, closing the door and settling back into the seat, Daniel's arm dropping his grip on her and wrapping around her shoulders.

After a while, she could feel his eyes boring into the side of her face, but Ringo was too nervous all of a sudden to look at him and let the inevitable happen.

After a few more minutes, Daniel huffed impatiently and gripped her cheeks, forcing her head to face towards him and smashed his lips against hers.

Ringo squeaked at the contact, hitting his arms to get him away. He refused to listen, moving his lips forcefully against her own, trying to get the response he wanted.

She eventually managed to break him away by squeezing her leg up and pushing her foot against his chest to get him back. His eyes turned from lustful to anger really quickly, moving forward again and

shoving her foot aside.

Reacting out of fear, Ringo shot the heel of her palm out and made contact with the tip of his nose, hearing a small crunch as a result. Her eyes widened in horror as blood began to drip down from his nostrils.

Ringo whirled around and opened the door once more, scrambling to get out of the car and sprinting as hard as she could away from the parking lot.

Having no choice but to walk home, Ringo cried and cried until her eyes were red and her cheeks were soaked. She was sure she looked insane to the cars passing by, but she couldn't bring herself to care.

Shuffling her coat tighter around herself, she trudged forward, desperate to get home. Shame and fear had filled her entire body. Her life in Florida had followed her here, threatening to ruin her life as it did there.

Too indulged in self pity and self hatred, she barely noticed a car pulling in on the side of the road ahead of her. When she noticed it, she stopped in her step, scared that it could have been Daniel again.

Upon further inspection, she breathed in relief at seeing the car was black, instead of navy - as Daniel's had been. Even worse though, it was a car she knew well.

Ringo kept her head down, walking even faster, eager to move past Steve Harrington before he could see her broken appearance.

"Ringo!" He called through the open window. "You need a ride?"

She shook her head, not even daring to look to prevent him from seeing her face.

"No, thanks!" She called back, cringing upon hearing her own voice - which was raspy and hoarse.

Steve's expression twisted in confusion, believing that Ringo was mad at him for a second, despite making a truce with her the night before.

He crept the car forward slowly, keeping up with her pace of walking.

"You sure you don't want a ride? You'd be the first to die in a horror movie!" He joked with an easy grin, the car still slithering along the side of the road.

She ignored him this time, still walking along.

"Ringo, come on!" He yelled again, giving her one last chance. Steve sighed when she finally gave in and turned to the car, opening the door and climbing inside roughly.

Ringo kept her face forward, not even daring to look at him. He was ready to ask why she was so mad at him, until he squinted enough to notice her damp cheeks and running mascara.

"Are you okay?" He questioned worriedly, in a soft voice to avoid startling her. His car came to a complete stop near the kerb.

Ringo lifted her hands and wiped her cheeks furiously, leaving red skin in her wake.

"I'm fine, just drive please," she begged quietly.

"Hey, no, come on," he pleaded with her, turning in his seat to face her completely. "We're okay with each other now, right? Some people would even call this a friendship. Tell me what happened."

Ringo sniffled quietly, turning and looking at him finally. He inhaled sharply when he saw the full extent of how upset she was. Despite every argument they had, he very much wanted at that moment to lean over and hug her, she just looked so *sad*.

"A date gone wrong," she forced a small smile, out of politeness. His head tilted in confusion.

"With who?"

"Daniel Ashford..."

"Did he hurt you?" Steve demanded, anger filling him all of a sudden

at the prospect of her being hurt.

"No, he just..." she trailed off, her eyes looking down, "can you just take me home? Please?"

"How about this," he began, putting his car into gear and preparing to take off once more, "we'll go somewhere nice for a little while until you have to get home. Ten o'clock, right? You're dressed up too pretty tonight to go home crying."

Her eyes met his, full of surprise. She was wholeheartedly touched by his gesture, Ringo couldn't even bring herself to try to deny him and his kind smile.

"I'd really like that.."

Hi again! I hope everyone liked this chapter!

I know some people might not like that Ringo didn't defend Jonathan, but try to remember that what he did was actually quite creepy and probably a violation of some kind of law by taking non-consensual pictures of Nancy, half naked through a window. It was fucked up, let's admit it, I didn't feel that Ringo defending that would have made sense with her characterisation - a fierce, girl-power loving, 80's era feminist. But don't worry, eventually she'll forgive him, as Steve and Nancy did.

Thanks for reading!

candy95 - Thanks so much! I feel like if Ringo had been there during the argument with Barb and Nancy, it would have ended up a lot different and she would have left with Barb, which would affect her disappearance. When I write stories I'm really adamant on creating OCs that aren't just there during canon scenes with a few additional lines of dialogue, I like to change the main story a little, but Barb's death is such a major part I don't want to mess with it, does that make sense? Probably not haha, but thank you for reviewing it means the world 3

harleyquinn87 - Thank youuuu! They'll definitely be getting a lot

closer as Nancy and Jonathan team up! x

soylachicaimposible - Oh no that's so hateful! I hate when that happens to me! . But I'm glad you're invested and I hope you like where the story goes!

7. Brainshake

RINGO HUMMED SOFTLY ALONG TO HUNGRY EYES, which was playing on the radio in the small diner - only stopping when Steve returned to their booth with two milkshakes in hand.

"I figure since you're new and all you haven't got a chance to come to Brainshakes yet," he smiled brightly, slipping one of the milkshakes towards her. Ringo's head tilted with curiosity at the sheer brightness of its colour - neon blue, with a vast dollop of cream on top.

"It looks like a cavity in a glass," she joked, directing the straw towards her mouth and taking a small sip. Steve watched carefully for her reaction, taking a drink of his own identical one.

"Woah," Ringo spoke, eyes wide as she pulled away. "That's actually pretty good."

"See how much easier your life would be if you listened to me?" He raised his eyebrows, sipping through his straw, causing a giggle to rise in her. He smiled at the sound, happy to see that she wasn't as down now as she had been a short time before.

When Steve had realised Ringo was upset, he was at a loss with himself about how to react. But it seems this had been the right option, it was where he would always go to feel better himself.

"So," he began hesitantly, lifting her gaze up from her shake to meet his eyes. "Who was it?"

She visibly cringed, obviously not wanting to talk about *it* but answering none the less.

"Daniel Ashford."

Steve sighed, he knew the name well - everyone at school did. The two had never gotten along since middle school, with Daniel being jealous of Steve's athletic abilities and Steve taking advantage of that fact to use as an ego boost.

"I used to call him Daniel Assford," he offered, her lips turning up at

the name.

"His breath does smell like ass," she chuckled.

"If it makes you feel better, I'll accidentally key his car tomorrow," Steve winked at her, daring her to smile, which she did.

"Why are you being so nice to me?" Ringo asked suddenly, taking him by surprise.

"Well, we made a truce..."

"Yeah, a truce doesn't mean picking me up from the side of the road and telling corny jokes to make me smile when I'm upset," she said in a gentle tone, trying not to cause offence but desperate for an answer.

Steve looked away, wondering himself what the answer was. He couldn't explain it, not even to himself. But there was something about Ringo that made him want to be a better person, like he had to meet her standards of what she defined a decent human being

"Maybe you're not half bad, Wheeler," he smirked, watching as her expression softened.

"Is this the coveted secret side to Steve Harrington that only Nancy gets to see?" Her jaw dropped in feigned shock, eliciting a groan from the man in question.

"I'm not even that bad! You like my friendship, admit it!"

"No!" She laughed, shaking her head enough for a small curl to fall from the up-do she had styled her hair in.

"Admit it or I'll take the milkshake away!" He reached for the end of her glass, sliding it back towards him teasingly. Ringo gasped and shot her hand out protectively around it, narrowing her eyes playfully.

"Fine," huffing, she looked up towards the ceiling instead of into his eyes, "I like the fact that you took me here and bought me a milkshake. There. That's all you're getting," she scrunched her nose up, as she often did to show she was joking.

"I'll accept it," he pulled his hand back, a grin falling on his lips.

When it came time to leave, Steve drove slower than usual back to the Wheeler residence, watching the blonde from the corner of his eye as she gazed out of her window curiously.

She gasped loudly out of nowhere, startling him enough to jump and swerve the car slightly.

"What? Jesus! What?" He shouted in shock, looking around wildly for an obstruction.

"Nothing, I just like this song," she laughed loudly at his reaction, eliciting an eye roll from him. She reached forward and fiddled with the knob, turning the song up louder.

"Rhiannon by Fleetwood Mac?" He asked, already knowing the answer when she nodded her head. "You get that album yet?"

"No," she huffed, crossing her arms over her chest. "I told you, I'm cursed!"

"Calm down, this isn't the Twilight Zone," he mulled over whether or not he would ask his next question, making the decision in a split second. "Want to go check again?"

"But the record store will be closed by now," she furrowed her brows, pointing to his watch circling his wrist.

"So?" Steve grinned wickedly, taking a turn to head back into town instead.

"Steve! I'm not going to break in and steal it!" Her eyes were wide with shock, although the excitement of such a venture definitely appealed to her.

"We won't steal it!" He denied. "If its there we'll leave cash!"

Steve pulled in to park further down the street, to avoid raising suspicion. Turning in his seat, he looked to her patiently, waiting for her answer.

Ringo bit her lower lip, looking back and forth between the Harrington boy and the record store further up. She supposed that as long as they didn't get caught, it would be okay. They wouldn't dare steal anything.

"Okay, let's do it," she beamed excitedly, adrenaline rushing through her as she opened her door and exited quickly, Steve following suit.

They rounded around the back of the store, wondering how they would enter the building without breaking a window, which Ringo was adamant against.

"Look!" He pointed upwards, drawing her attention to a small window higher up than them which was left adjacent.

"We'll never get up there," she sighed, the dreaded curse coming back to bite her.

"I won't, but you might," he backed against the wall, crouching ever so slightly and cupping his hands together in front of him. "Come on!"

She held in a giggle, excitement bubbling over as she placed her foot into his hands, which he then propelled upwards until she was high enough to reach the window.

Using her upper body strength, Ringo hauled herself up and inside of the building, grunting from the exertion.

She had landed inside a small employee bathroom, so using the lightest of footsteps, she stepped out and half-ran downstairs to the record bins before they were caught.

Outside, Steve paced around anxiously, waiting for the blonde Wheeler girl to reappear so they could make a quick getaway.

Eventually, within ten minutes of Steve looking for anything in the near vicinity to use as a step up, to no avail, he heard scuffling at the window again.

Ringo began to shakily back out of the window, backwards, holding onto the window and slipping her feet down the wall, desperate not to fall. Just in case, Steve held his hands beneath her.

"Any luck?" He asked, slightly confused by how much he hoped she had retrieved it.

"No," she rolled her eyes in annoyance, stepping down into Steve's waiting hands as he gripped her hips to stop her from dropping straight down.

"Sorry, Ringo," Steve cringed as they began to trail back to the car.

"It's fine, I wasn't expecting to find it anyway. Plus, it was kind of exciting," she chuckled like a schoolgirl, her laughter contagious enough for Steve to join in.

They walked together back to the car, their quiet conversation halting at the sound of sirens nearby.

"Oh my god," Steve gasped, his step slowing, sure they had been caught.

"Fuck!" Ringo cursed, grabbing Steve and hauling him into an alleyway behind them, pressing her body flat against the wall to hide herself, Steve following her action.

"How did they find out?" Steve whispered, but Ringo didn't answer, absolutely terrified of getting arrested what Mrs Wheeler would say. There was only so many family members she had left to go and love with.

They held their breath when the flashing blue lights passed by the alley, soaring down the street. When they continued to get further and further away, Ringo's expression dropped to one of suspicion. She leaned closer to the edge of the alleyway and peaked down the street, noting that the cars did not stop at Groovy Tunes and instead continued on.

"They're going somewhere else," she sighed in relief, her hand cupping her forehead. Steve deflated, clearly thankful that they hadn't been caught.

"I wonder where they're going.."

When he finally pulled into her driveway, admittedly, she was

slightly reluctant to get out of the car, fiddling with her fingers and smiling awkwardly.

"I.. um, I just wanted to say thank you."

"For what?" He asked in confusion.

"For making this night suck a lot less."

He settled for a nod of his head, but she took him by surprise again when she leaned over and wrapped her arms around him. Steve was frozen for a moment in shock, but eventually wrapped his arms around her in return and hugged her back.

When Ringo pulled away, the car was silent as she turned and exited through the door, bounding up the driveway to the Wheeler house.

Steve watched until she stepped up to the door, smiling and waving back when she gave him a small wave. When she was safely inside, he started up the engine and left.

The second she stepped inside the door, Ringo's mood instantly shifted by the scene waiting for her. Nancy's soft cries could be heard from the kitchen. Ringo followed the sound, and found her cousin there, crying into her mother's arms.

"Woah, hey, hey," she rushed forward, worry flooding through the teenager. "What's going on?"

Nancy tried to explain to her, but she was so overcome by sobs that she couldn't get the words through, eventually her mother explained for her.

"Barb's missing," she murmured, "and they found Will's body."

Ringo couldn't bring up words to reply, she was so overcome with shock, she didn't know where to start.

"Barb?" She began with, eyes widened as they looked back and forth between Nancy and her mother. Come to think of it, she didn't see the redhead at school all day.

"Her car is still where she left it, and she left the party before we did and didn't go home," Nancy managed to say, sniffing and wiping her cheeks with her sleeves.

"The police were here already," Karen murmured, rubbing her daughter's back.

"And... Will?" Ringo's voice cracked, she had felt so ridiculous for getting worked up over her problems earlier, when there was a mother out there who had lost her child and would never get to see him, alive and healthy, again.

"They found him in the lake by the quarry," Karen explained. Ringo shook her head in denial, running her hands over her face and sitting down on the ground she was already crouching over.

"Shit," she swore, tears pricking at her eyes.

"Ringo?" Nancy's voice called out that night, knowing that she too, would be wide awake and unable to sleep.

"Yeah?" She whispered back. It was a common occurrence for Ringo and Nancy to share late night talks about their day ever since she moved in, but this was completely overshadowed by the events of the evening.

"How did your date go then?" She asked, trying to take her mind off of matters.

"I don't think it could have gone *worse*," Ringo sighed, burying her cheek further into her pillow.

"What happened?" Nancy reached up and flicked her lamp on so she could look down at her cousin.

"Let's just say I'm pretty sure I broke his nose and expect to be a social pariah within the next few hours."

Nancy's expression dropped to one of sympathy, holding her hand out of her bed for Ringo to hold in comfort.

"Maybe the family name is unlucky," Nancy mused thoughtfully, her tone quiet and sad. "First Will, now Barb..."

"Remind me not to make friends in Hawkins, then," she breathed a laugh, which felt entirely forced.

The next day at school, Ringo could barely focus her gaze on any words on the book in front of her. Her classes droned on, and every time they broke by the bell, she expected to walk into the hallway and be met with judgemental stares or laughing.

Halfway through her chemistry class, once again she was incapable of listening. Ringo caught Steve's eye from across the room, frowning her brows in confusion as he tried to mime something to her.

"What?" She mouthed, trying to read his lips and hand movements. Before she got the chance, she was stopped by the door to the classroom opening, and the school secretary stepping inside.

"Ringo Wheeler?" She called out, prompting the entire class to turn and look at the girl in question.

Ringo's heart hammered in her chest as she shoved her book back into her bag, clutching her strap tight enough for her fingers to whiten and following the woman out of class. The secretary led Ringo down the hallway, towards the now-empty cafeteria.

She was expecting to be called in for the events that happened last night with Daniel, perhaps he had concocted a story at her expense.

Upon entry, she saw that there was already a small group there - consisting of two police officers, Nancy and Karen.

"Take a seat please, Ms Wheeler," one of the cops gestured towards the free seat on the other side of Karen, their stares making her feel pressured as she sat down.

"Ringo, is it?" He made sure, continuing when she nodded her head. "We're here to talk to you about the night of Steve Harrington's party two nights ago. Did you witness this fight between Barb and Nancy?"

"It wasn't a fight," Nancy interjected exhaustedly. "Barb wanted to go home, and I didn't. So I told her to go, and that's it."

"No," Ringo answered with a shake of her head. "I fell asleep at that house, the last time I was awake and saw her, Barb was with us, having fun."

"That was the last time you saw her?"

"Yes."

He turned back to Nancy then, looking to her for an answer in his pending question.

"And then you claim that you went back the next day, and saw this... bear?"

Ringo's eyes narrowed at this, she wasn't aware Nancy had went back to Steve's, or that she saw anything suspicious.

"It wasn't a bear," she huffed frustratedly, "I think maybe it... took Barb. You need to check behind Steve's house-

"We did," the other officer answered for the first time since Ringo arrived. "There's nothing there. No sign of a bear, and no car."

"What?" Nancy hissed, Ringo suddenly feeling defensive of her.

"Look, we figure that Barbara came back last night, took the car and went off somewhere else. Has she ever talked to you about running off? Leaving town maybe?"

While Nancy was stuttering for her reply, trying to formulate one, Ringo answered for her.

"No. Barb would panic if she was late for dinner at her parents house. She's not the type to just up and leave everyone."

"She wasn't maybe upset about the fact that Nancy was spending time with this boy?" Ringo watched suspiciously, trying to figure out what he was insinuating. "Steve Harrington?"

"What? No!" Nancy replied pleadingly, it was clear they weren't taking her claim as serious as she wished.

"Maybe she was jealous because she saw you go up to Steve's room?" The second cop intervened again.

"It wasn't like that. Steve and me - we're just friends. We just talked."

Ringo's eyes downcast to the table, Nancy almost sounded believable.

"Was that before or after you changed out of your clothes?"

"Hey," Ringo cut him off, "that's a little inappropriate, don't you think?"

"And you, you slept through the entire thing and didn't wake up? Were you under the influence?" They turned on Ringo, next.

"No," she shook her head, swallowing her lie, "I was just tired. I had a long week, with moving here and stuff."

"Must have been extremely tired," he replied disbelievingly, "is there anyone that can vouch that you were asleep?"

"I can," Nancy offered. "And Steve carried her, asleep, to the couch in the living room."

"He did?" Ringo couldn't help but ask, eyebrows furrowed. She couldn't remember that at all, she really had to have been in a deep sleep to not notice being carried and jostled.

"I think we have all that we need," one of the two sighed, closing up his file and moving to stand up. "We'll be interviewing the others that were at the party today."

"Thank you," Karen thanked them, prompting Ringo and Nancy to roll their eyes.

Is it bad I really ship Stingo (Steve and Ringo) even though I'm writing the damn book?

Thanks everyone for reading!

psychosae - WOw thank you! It's especially flattering for you to say that seeing as you also said you wouldn't usually like Stranger Things fics, so thank you! I hope you continue to like it x

PondLake - Not at all! I'd like to hopefully convey that Ringo and Steve have a connection they don't understand, kinda like Nancy and Jonathan do. Thanks for leaving a review! 3

candy95 - One of your favourite OCs?! MY HEART! I always want to write OCs that are likeable so hearing stuff like that makes my day. I completely agree, some fics feel so boring when it's literally just the same dialogue and events as the show with occasionally a new line of dialogue added in, it's like rewatching the show all over again. I hope I don't do that anyway! Thanks so much, have a great day xx

8. For the Popcorn

Karen Wheeler didn't speak a single word to her daughter or niece the entire drive home, which was never a good sign. The two teenagers knew that Karen had a lot more to say than 'get in the car', she was simply waiting to get home before she'd unleash fury on the both of them.

The second she pulled into the driveway and harshly yanked on the handbrake, Ringo and Nancy scuttled quickly out of the car, tripping over each other to get inside and to the safety of their room.

Karen, however, couldn't wait any longer until they were out of their neighbours hearing distance.

"I cannot *believe* you two!" She exploded, startling the girls enough to jump. Ringo's eyes were widened, standing behind Nancy as her cousin opened the door to the house.

Nancy had forced her way forward, but suddenly Ringo was too afraid to run away from Karen - thoughts of being kicked out or her parents being called springing to mind. So as Nancy marched forward through the house stubbornly with Karen hot on her tail, she stood to the side, ready to take her punishment as a woman.

"You both lied to the police!" Karen bellowed the second she slammed the door shut.

"I didn't lie," Nancy's voice cracked, further angering her mother. Ringo didn't dare speak a word, just following in the back quietly.

"How *naïve* do you think I am?! You and Steve were just talking?" She reared around to face her niece, pointing an accusatory finger at her then. "You passed out because you were '*tired*'? I knew it from the second you came home afterwards, I could *smell* the alcohol a mile away!"

"I'm sorry, Mrs Wheeler-" Ringo pleaded, heart hammering in her chest. Nancy finally stopped her mad dash through the house to face her mother.

"Fine! We slept together and Ringo got drunk! Is that what you want to know? Because it doesn't even matter!"

"It does matter!"

"No! It is all bullshit!" Nancy yelled back, her voice just as loud as her mother's. Ringo wondered where she got the balls to shout at her parents like that. "It has nothing to do with Barb and she's missing and something terrible happened to her, I know it! And no one is listening to me!"

Finally breaking down into tears, Nancy made a move again towards the stairs, filled with worry and guilt for her missing friend. Her breakdown softened her mother's approach, who tried to catch her arm and assure her that *she* was listening to her.

"I am listening to you, Nancy!" She pleaded, trying to keep her downstairs.

"No you're not!" Nancy spit back, breaking free from her grip and dashing upstairs.

"Nancy! Nancy!"

"Just leave me alone!"

When the door of her bedroom slammed shut, Karen covered her face with her hands, exhaustion starting to settle in. She barely remembered the other teenager in the room, who had been silent during the ordeal. The small sound of whimpering met her ears, and Karen lifted her head to see her niece crying quietly down the hallway, trying to keep quiet.

"Oh sweetie," Karen cooed, shuffling towards her and wrapping her arms around the blonde securely. Ringo hugged her back eagerly, desperate for a sense of security.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry- I didn't mean for anything bad to happen," she sobbed into the older woman's shoulder, who soothingly rubbed her back to calm her.

"Of course you didn't, I know that," she murmured to her.

"I drank because I wanted to feel comfortable with myself and I haven't felt like that since I got to Hawkins," her voice was hoarse from crying and occasionally her words stuttered from sobbing. "Please don't kick me out, I can't go back home."

"You're not getting kicked out," Karen squeezed her tighter. "Maybe it's all for the better, right? You would have got in trouble for underage drinking, anyway."

After a few moments, Ringo pulled away, wiping her cheeks quickly in embarrassment. It felt like she hadn't stopped crying lately, and for once she wanted to feel stronger than she was.

"Why don't you go and take a shower, and then we'll go out and bring back some take-out for tonight, how does that sound?" Karen cupped her cheeks, smiling warmly.

"Okay," she forced a smile, touched by her kindness. Karen Wheeler's actions were how every mother should have reacted to a child being upset, trying to understand the teenagers actions instead of jumping to blame them for it.

A knock at her bedroom window caused her to gasp in surprise. Ringo shot up from her cot, tossing aside the comic book she had stolen from Mike. After flicking through one of them in the basement out of boredom one day, she had found herself addicted to the series, and occasionally rifled through his bedroom for the other issues. Mike had caught her one day, of course, completely freaking out about her shuffling through his bedroom.

Ringo huffed when she saw Steve Harrington's face through the glass, sliding the window up and raising her eyebrow at him.

"Nancy's not here," she told him, marching back to her cot and flopping down on top of it, bringing the comic book above her face again to read.

"What do you mean?" He asked in frustration, looking disappointed. Steve climbed through the window none the less, trying to be as quiet as he possibly could with his gangly limbs.

"She said she was out with a friend," the girl shrugged, flicking through another page, eyes skimming over the text and graphic images.

"We had a fight," Steve sighed, sitting down on Nancy's bed and scraping his hand through his mane of hair.

"What did you do?" Ringo asked knowingly.

"How do you know it was something I did?"

Ringo smirked and looked over at him, her face saying it all.

"Alright, it was my fault," he conceded, rolling his eyes. "She told the cops about the party at my house and I didn't want her to, because I didn't want to get in trouble."

"So you were like," Ringo sat up, deepening her voice suddenly to mimic him, "fuck *Barb*, Nancy! I don't want my parents cutting my allowance!"

"Hey," he groaned, tossing a stray pillow at her. "I came here to apologise to her. And then I was going to ask her to come to the game with me tonight."

"Well," Ringo shrugged and turned around onto her stomach, "like I said, she's not here."

Steve's head tilted suddenly, looking at the girl with a small smirk, her eyes narrowing upon noticing it.

"What?" She asked in suspicion.

"Why don't you come with me to the game?" He offered, her reaction was immediate and in the form of a snort.

"There are a million things I'd rather do. Like die, for example."

"Come on!" He huffed, throwing another pillow at her. This time, she caught it and launched it back, hitting him square in the face. "People are gonna start to think you're a loser if you never go out!"

"People', meaning you and your friends?" She replied sassily.

"Look, it's either come out to the game, you can even get some popcorn or a hot dog or whatever, or stay here in your room reading..." he plucked the comic from her hands, ignoring her protests as he read the title, "*Captain America*. Really, Ringo?"

"Hey! I don't make fun of you and the bag of playboys you probably have stuffed into your seventh closet!"

"I don't have a-" he tried to deny, his face flushed suddenly, eliciting a loud laugh from Ringo. "I don't have *seven* closets."

"Okay, big bird," she stood up, smacking his bicep. "I'll go for the popcorn, but if I get bored and bail that's your own problem."

"Come on! Goddamn it!" Ringo shouted at the top of her voice from the bleachers, Steve's eyes were wide as he looked towards the blonde next to him.

"I thought you didn't like football?" He questioned in confusion.

"I don't, I just wanted to fit in," she grinned, shrugging her shoulders and relaxing back into the seat, shovelling another handful of popcorn into her mouth.

Steve shook his head in laughter, bewildered sometimes by her behaviour. They watched quietly as another player from the opposing team body slammed a Hawkins player, immediately the crowd reacted in shouts of rage.

"Damn, this reminds me of back home," Ringo mused.

"Football?"

"No," she shook her head, "two guys pummelling each other."

"Okay," Steve murmured disbelievingly, engrossed by the game, "I bet you lived in a nice suburban home and only think you're poor because you have, like, two bathrooms," Steve brushed off jokingly, but Ringo didn't laugh.

"Nah, I lived in a trailer park actually," she commented casually, taking him off guard.

"O-oh," he stuttered, unsure of how to react.

"It's not as bad as it sounds. It's quite fun actually. You hear a rustle outside and most people would think it's the wind, but us trailer park people think 'damn, am I getting robbed again?'"

It was clear she was joking, but Steve wasn't sure if he should laugh - instead, he chose to change the subject.

"Hey, you really did break his nose," he barked a laugh when he caught sight of Daniel nearby behind them, pointing towards him for her to see too.

When she looked over her shoulder and saw his nose was covered in white tape, Ringo chuckled too, blowing on her fingers and then rubbing them on her shoulder, sassily.

"Oops! My hand slipped!" She beamed triumphantly and spoke in a childish voice. Steve continued to stare back, noticing that Daniel was now fully glaring at the back of her head. He then made eye contact with Steve, and did something he wouldn't have expected - smirked.

Ringo didn't see what was going on, trying to pay attention to the game as she shoved more popcorn into her mouth, but Steve did. He watched as Daniel suddenly lifted up his backpack and rifled through it, bringing out a picture and showing it to his friend beside him.

Steve's eyebrows furrowed as Daniel encouraged his neighbour to pass along the photograph, which then made its way along the line of students in that row. When it neared a parent or the end of the row, the person holding it would pass it downwards to the next row. Each of those who would see the picture, would instantly react by laughing loudly or widening their eyes in surprise, looking at Ringo and Steve with agape mouths.

Daniel was still smirking at Steve, making him think whatever image the picture held related directly to him.

Ringo noticed Steve's sudden distraction, turning her head and asking him innocently what was wrong.

"Nothing," he forced a smile, looking back toward the game but not really focusing on it this time around.

His reverie was broken by a tap on his shoulder, Steve turned to look and saw a sophomore holding the photograph in question, a wide grin on his face. Against his better judgement, Steve took the photograph and inspected it, instantly grimacing.

"What is it?" Ringo asked, leaning over to get a look. Without hesitation, Steve ripped the photograph up into pieces, letting it drop to the ground beneath him. "What the hell?" She huffed in confusion.

"It's nothing, Ringo," he refuted, but she bent down anyway and picked a particularly larger torn piece up, her heart almost stopping as she instantly recognised what picture this originally was. The image had been burned into her mind for weeks now, making it easily familiar.

"Where did you get this?" She whispered, absolute shame filling her.

"Daniel was sending it around, Ringo..." he admitted quietly, feeling complete and utter pity for her. If the same thing had happened to him, he wouldn't have been able to handle it.

There was no denying the girl in the picture was Ringo, except she was showcased in a manner he had never seen her before - asleep on a bed and completely naked.

Out of nowhere, Ringo tossed her popcorn to the ground and turned around, stepping up onto the bench she was seated at and climbing up and over it. She continued her way up, shoving people mercilessly and climbing onto benches to reach Daniel, who was seated at the top row.

When she finally did reach him, she was practically shaking with anger, and Steve was only beginning to get up and follow her now, getting over the initial shock.

"You did this?" She spoke through gritted teeth, her shoulders rising

and falling quickly and her fists clenched at her side.

"Bingo, Ringo!" He laughed, his amused expression falling for a second into one of shock. "Hey - Bingo, Ringo! That rhymes!"

His comment sparked laughter in the group surrounding him, even Ringo laughed along with him - although hers was entirely faked.

As the feigned grin fell from her face, without warning, she shot her fist out and hit his nose once more, hearing a crack as it was re-broken.

"Fuck, Ringo!" He howled in pain, clutching his nose that began to bleed once more. The break did nothing to ease her pain, so in an uncontrollable fit of rage, she launched at him, knocking him backwards against the wall at the top of the bleachers. Too in shock to react quickly, Ringo began to hit him in the face with her fists repeatedly. A cry rang out amongst the crowd, but no one attempted to pull her back. That was, until Steve had arrived.

Scooping his hands under her armpits, he completely hauled her into the air and away from Daniel, settling her beside him.

"Let it go, Ringo!" He shouted, trying to restrain her. Steve was surprised that she was able to do damage at all with how tiny her fists was, but he also knew now that Ringo didn't learn to fight in a Suburban, middle class neighbourhood like Daniel clearly had.

Ringo huffed and began to storm away from them, the crowd parting like a sea to allow her through, scared she would lash out on any of them.

"Fucking crazy slut!" Daniel shouted after her, while being helped off the ground by his friends surrounding him. Steve stopped before he chased after her, turning to Daniel and lifting his foot out - he kicked it against Daniel's chest to send him falling back against the wall, again.

"You so much as look at her again Ashford, and you're dead!" He threatened him, not waiting for a response before he darted off after the blonde.

He located her in the parking lot, waiting beside Steve's car, knowing full well he would have followed her and that it was fruitless to run home.

Steve approached her slowly, suddenly afraid she would snap at him for some reason. When she heard his feet rustling towards her, her head moved sharply up, seeing Steve approach her instantly calmed her down.

"I'm not a slut, okay?" She commanded, her arms crossed over her chest and a frown on her face. Ringo's cheeks were as red as Steve's sweater.

"I know," Steve agreed, pushing forward towards her.

"Guys call girls sluts for doing the exact same thing as they do," she continued on in a rant. "I had sex with a guy, I get called a slut. You have sex with a girl and you get praised for it. It's fucking *ridiculous*."

"I know," Steve reached her, leaning against the side of the car next to her.

"A guy takes a picture of me, naked, after sex and suddenly it's my fault that he took the picture? Like I pressed the camera button while I was *asleep*?" She was shouting now, fuelled by rage and embarrassment.

"It's disgusting," Steve tried to soothe her, wrapping his arm around her shoulders and hugging her from the side.

Ringo was quiet for a few moments, her voice dropping lower as her sadness overpowered her rage.

"That's the reason I was sent here."

"Because a guy took a photo of you?" Steve inhales sharply in disgust. It was hardly a fair punishment, not that she deserved any punishment at all.

"He didn't just take the picture. He printed the film and showed all of his friends. They made copies of it as a joke, and the next thing I know I'm walking into school with my naked body plastered on every

locker and door in the building."

"Jesus, Ringo," he hissed with a shake of his head, feeling absolute anger and disgust at her situation. Nobody deserved to be put through that, but from what he knew of her, Ringo especially didn't.

She didn't reply, and the next few minutes were spent with him squeezing her shoulder and Ringo taking deep breaths to calm down. Deciding he would try and help, Steve attempted to make her laugh.

"So, which song on your mixtape was going through your head when you kicked his ass?" Steve brought up, smiling brightly when he managed to amuse her. Ringo started to chuckle.

"...Immigrant Song," she admitted, causing him to bellow in laughter. Steve clutched his stomach as he laughed, and eventually Ringo joined in, the two a mess of laughter in the empty parking lot.

"I'll give it to you, I was right to call you Ass Kicker," he shook his head, looking at her, full of amusement and underlying pity. "You ready to go home or is there anyone else on your hit list?"

"Hmm," she mused playfully, tapping her index finger against her chin. "Mrs Snider gave me a C, let's go fuck that bitch up."

Steve cackled in laughter again, opening the passenger door for her to climb inside and then retreating to his own, to drive her home.

Hi! So Ringo's background is finally revealed, for anyone that thinks it's a little dark, try to remember that as awesome as the 80s were, the slut shaming culture was extreme back then.

I hope everyone is enjoying the book so far! x

psychosae - and I love that you think they have chemistry! thanks so much! xx

FoxiOrgami - That's such a compliment for an OC, thank you sweetie! She's known the kids now for years, they interacted a lot in chapter three and four! x

candy95 - Good, thank god for that! I have to agree that I love their friendship too. I feel like I'm able to show more of Steve's soft side in season one because he's friends with Ringo and enjoys her company. Haha! I love a good bit of Mama Karen lecturing too if I'm honest!

9. All The Right Moves

THE DAY OF WILL BYER'S FUNERAL HAD ARRIVED, and needless to say, the entire household held a dark tone to it.

Nancy and Ringo were getting ready in their shared bedroom, donning their clothes and preparing themselves to look appropriate.

"You know," Ringo began randomly, disrupting the silence of the bedroom, "one time down in the basement a few years ago - I came to visit for the weekend, remember? Anyways, I dressed up as Princess Leia or something, and the boys had to all run around and save me. At the end of the day, Dustin brought cookies for everyone that his mom made for the gang. There wasn't enough for me but I didn't mind, but Will split his cookie and made me take half. He said that we were friends now and that friends should always look after each other."

Nancy looked down after hearing the anecdote, a sad expression on her face.

"I mean, I know it's a stupid story," Ringo shook her head with a soft smile, "but he was just such a great kid. Like if that was my brother I'd have been so *proud*."

"He was really nice," Nancy admitted, embarrassed that she had barely gotten to know her brother's friend recently. As she grew older, she strayed away from the group in her desperate attempts to appear like an adult.

"I can't help but think that I should have walked them home or something, I'm seventeen now. I should have walked them all home to make sure they were safe."

Nancy inhaled sharply, knowing how much more dangerous the world was now, something she had yet to tell her cousin about.

"You can't blame yourself, Ringo," she reached out and gripped the blonde's forearm in comfort. "He rode his bike home every night he came here. You couldn't possibly have predicted this would happen."

Ringo nodded, smiling softly in gratitude at the younger girl.

"By the way," Ringo sighed, knowing she couldn't put off this conversation any longer. "You should probably know, it might damage your reputation a little to hang around with me for a while."

"Why?" Nancy frowned.

Releasing another breath, Ringo sat down on the large bed beside her cousin and relayed the story to her - the events that happened in Orlando and what happened the night before. It was something she hadn't disclosed before, only Nancy's parents knew.

"Wow," Nancy whispered, speechless, her eyes wide with surprise by the end of the story. She felt nothing but sympathy. "Ringo, that isn't your fault, you have to know that."

Wordlessly, she reached around and hugged her tightly, Ringo took a second's pause before returning her hug with equal force.

"God," Nancy huffed, leaning back and narrowing her eyes into the distance. "I'm gonna kick Daniel's ass so hard."

"What are you gonna do?" Ringo barked a laugh, "read your encyclopaedia to him until he dies of boredom?"

"Hey!" Nancy protested, shoving her lightly on the shoulder.

"Oh, Daniel! I'm going to recite the *entire* periodic table for that! There's hydrogen, then lithium, then beryllium..." she trailed off as her laughter intensified, Nancy joining in her amusement - mainly because of how high Ringo made her voice to mimic her.

"We shouldn't laugh, it's a serious day," Ringo's face dropped, all essence of humour gone except for a twitch in her cheek.

"You're right," Nancy stopped laughing and followed suit. But all it took was for the two cousins to make eye contact before they were laughing once more.

The funeral ceremony was as hard as one would expect, Ringo

supposed that not many people would have been able to attend a funeral of a young boy and come out without being completely affected.

She stood with the Wheelers, Nancy and her with their elbows hooked around the others for support, like they did when they were children.

Ringo's eyes couldn't help but continuously drift towards the Byers, feeling absolute pity for them and what they must have been going through - but not wanting to stare all the same. She remarked upon Jonathan, who looked as broken as ever next to his mother. Despite all that had happened between the two, she wished she was there to comfort him as a friend. Were they ever even friends?

When the procession ended and it came time to leave the grave, as was customary, the attendees approached Will's family to offer condolences. Will's father being the only one to actually greet anyone, understandably.

Ringo couldn't help but approach Jonathan as Karen spoke to Will's father, tapping him lightly on the shoulder to get his attention.

Jonathan turned in confusion, his face falling instantly upon seeing the blonde behind him.

"O-oh, hi Ringo.." he murmured softly, fearful of her reasoning for talking to him.

"I just wanted to say that- um..." she trailed off awkwardly, before throwing caution to the wind and stepping forward to wrap her arms around him tightly.

It took him a moment to respond, but when he did, he wrapped his arms around her too - albeit confusedly.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled against his shoulder, pulling away and giving him the smallest of smiles in politeness. The gesture looked as if it had meant something to him, and for that - she was glad.

As Ringo stepped aside, desperate to not be overbearing, she noticed that Nancy and him shared a simple nod with each other. The nod

wasn't what had caught her attention - rather the look in Nancy's eyes as she did it. As if they shared a secret.

As they began to walk back to the car, Nancy stopped suddenly in her step, her thumb pointing over her shoulder.

"You know what, I think I'm gonna stay behind and talk to Jonathan. He needs a friend right now," she forced a smile as she began to walk backwards.

"Of course, sweetie," Karen had agreed, but Ringo's eyes were narrowed. Since when had Jonathan and Nancy become close pals?

There was something her cousin was hiding from her, and she was determined to find out what.

"Ringo!" Karen called through the house. The blonde, who was laying on her cot asleep in a nap, awakened with a jolt. She ran her hand down her face, rubbing her eyes with her forefingers to waken up before she could answer.

"What?"

"Phone!" Ringo huffed as she got off of her bed, sitting on Nancy's instead so she could reach the phone that sat on her bedside locker.

Picking it up, she brought it to her ear, hesitantly - afraid it had been one of her parents.

"Hello?" She mumbled, still tired from her disrupted nap.

"Get ready, we're going to see a movie," a voice sounded from the other end, instantly recognisable.

"Steve?"

"No it's David Bowie," he drawled sarcastically. "Yes it's Steve!"

"What did you want?" She asked again, suddenly feeling more alert. For what reason, she was unsure of.

"I *said* we're going to see a movie. Nancy said she can't come, so you're my back up."

"Gee, thanks!" Ringo rolled her eyes, wondering where her godforsaken cousin had eloped to that day - she hadn't been seen since the funeral. "Why don't I just go ahead and carry you and Nancy's children now too, seeing as I'm basically already carrying this relationship!"

"Come on," he groaned. "She's being weird with me, I just want to go out with a friend and forget about the fact my girlfriend doesn't want to see me and almost hit me with a baseball bat."

"Yeah, she really needs to work on her aim."

"Ringo!"

"*Fine*," she moaned, dragging herself off of the bed and shoving the phone back down onto the receiver, retreating to her pile of clothes still packed inside of her suitcase to get ready.

"I can't *believe* you're making me see All the Right Moves," Ringo whined once again from the seat next to Steve, shoving another handful of popcorn into her mouth, messily dropping two pieces down onto her lap.

The entire cinema screening was almost empty - save for Ringo and Steve, and three more lone stragglers scattered throughout the cinema.

"Oh, come on, it's amazing!" He held his hand out to the screen in exasperation. "Besides, everyone thinks I look like Stefan."

"Everyone's right, you do look like a douchebag," she grinned widely and innocently, turning her head to the side to look up at him. Despite it being an insult, he couldn't help but laugh at her goofy expression.

"You're annoying," he rolled his eyes then, lifting his hand and shoving her head lightly, messing up her hair.

"This movie is such a cliché! Like, a small town guy who wants to get away from his hometown because it's so boring," Ringo poked fun while she attempted to fix her hair, but upon spotting Steve's cringe - realised then why he liked the movie so much.

"What's your favourite movie then? Hmm?" He turned back on her, ready to make her the object of his humour.

"Halloween," she said without hesitation. His eyes narrowed in defeat, actually approving of her choice.

As the film progressed, with Ringo steadily ignoring it, she began to think about her life in Hawkins. She came to realise how close she and Steve had gotten since she first arrived, the difference in how she felt around him was truly remarkably, feeling even somewhat comfortable instead of disgusted. If someone had told her when they went to the bonfire that weeks later her and Steve would be close friends and regularly hang out - she would have laughed in their face. But now, it was almost too easy for them to be friends.

"So, hey. What's Nancy doing tonight?" Steve asked suddenly, nervous for her answer in case it counteracted Nancy's earlier excuse about being busy with family.

"I don't know, she's been weird all day. Why?"

"I just feel like she didn't want to hang out with me," Steve shrugged, looking visibly saddened by his theory.

"Why wouldn't she want to?" Ringo pressed, feeling out of sorts. Comforting others was a strong suit for her, but comforting *Steve Harrington*?

"Maybe she's just not that interested," he shrugged offhandedly, trying to appear nonchalant about the idea.

"Well, if she was - and I don't think that's the case, by the way - that's just something she can't help. We can't always control who we like, and it's nobody's fault for that, you know?" Ringo tried to explain as softly as possible, but Steve only answered her in the form of a nod of his head to show he heard her.

"Besides," she reached over and ruffled his perfectly styled hair, shivering as her hand made contact with his hair gel. "She'd be silly to not like a guy with as much hair gel as you do. You could build her a house and stick the bricks together by rubbing your hair on them."

"You're such an asshole," he laughed nonetheless, earning a reproachful look from another cinema-goer.

"She's going through a lot too, I mean Barb was her best friend and now she's lost her."

"You're right," he agreed, still looking somewhat downtrodden. Without warning, Steve grabbed her box of popcorn out of her hands and started to dig in.

"Hey!" She whisper-shouted, reaching for the box once more and attempting to tug it back, but Steve wouldn't allow it.

Eventually they were fully engaged in a tug-of-popcorn, trying to quiet their giggling but failing miserably. The game ended up with the popcorn falling to the ground, its entire contents spilling out onto the ground.

"Steve!" Ringo groaned, looking down at the now speckled floor with an exasperated expression.

"Ringo!" He mimicked her, breaking the two into laughter once more. They were interrupted by a sudden bright light being directed at their faces, and a theatre worker's voice to accompany it

"You two! Out!"

"What time is it?" Ringo questioned anxiously as Steve rolled his car into the Wheeler driveway.

"It's..." he paused to check his watch, "ten after eleven."

"*Shit*," she cursed flicking her hand through her hair and biting her lower lip. "I was supposed to be back at ten. I'm gonna be murdered."

"So climb through the window," he shrugged, as if it was an easy solution.

"The fuck I look like? Curious George?" She huffed, opening the car door and inhaling deeply, drawing on her cousins lying skills for her upcoming conversation with Karen Wheeler.

"Oh for god's sakes," Steve rolled his eyes, following suit and stepping out of the car. "I'll help you up."

Ringo watched with widened eyes as Steve dragged himself up onto the lower levelled roof, stepping carefully but expertly. When he was on the roof next to Nancy's window, he gestured for Ringo to follow.

"I can't do that!" She whisper shouted, weary of the Wheeler parents probably being awake. "I have the same upper body strength as Scooby Doo!"

"Well," Steve sighed exasperatedly, "at least Scooby Doo was cute!"

Ringo gasped loudly, her jaw dropping to open her mouth in insult. "You take that back!"

"Why don't you come on up here and make me?" He gestured to his feet, situated next to the water spout. When he broke into a wide smile, she suddenly realised what he was playing at.

"Oh, you're good," she looked at him with narrowed eyes, before shoving all of her hair into a ponytail using a hair tie surrounding her wrist. "Let's do this."

Ringo clapped her hands once for motivation, then proceeding to step up onto the bench against the wall as Steve had done. With her new elevated height, Steve hung his hand down towards her, for her to grab.

"Grab on, Scooby."

Ringo slipped her hand into his, the feeling of his larger hand surrounding hers feeling entirely foreign, making her realise with a pang of surprise that this was probably the first time she had ever held a boys hand, and it wasn't even done properly. Any of the boys

she had been with had never tried to be sweet with her.

Using all of his strength, Steve dragged Ringo up onto the roof, with the blonde using her feet against the wall to propel herself upward.

When she finally reached the safety of the roof, they broke into a round of silent giggles, faces red from the exertion and the ridiculousness their newfound friendship consisted of.

"You weren't actually that heavy, must be because your head is so empty," he joked, his hands behind her in case she fell backward as she stepped towards the window.

"Well, I know your head is definitely heavy with the ten tubs of hair gel you apply daily," she fired back, a smirk playing with her lips. Ringo gripped onto the window sill and reached to grab the window itself, attempting to shimmy it upwards. However, a sight inside made her halt.

"What is it?" Steve asked, noticing her hesitation. His voice snapped her out of it, and suddenly she was desperate to get inside and prevent him from seeing.

"Nothing!" She replied, her voice all too high to be believable.

"Come on!" Steve groaned, following after her when she slipped quietly inside the bedroom. Ringo stepped quickly, standing in front of the window to block his view of the bed.

Steve reached his hand in and shoved her to the side lightly, lips still upturned in amusement, not sure what to expect. His smile quickly dropped upon realising what she was hiding him from seeing.

"What the-?" He whispered, overcome with shock at the sight of his very own girlfriend, the same girlfriend who told him she was too busy tonight to see him, laying in bed next to Jonathan Byers.

"Steve..." Ringo murmured, shuffling towards him to try and calm him down.

"No it's okay," he replied quietly, not giving her a chance to say anything more to him as he scampered back down the roof to escape

to his car.

Ringo watched him from the window, a grimace on her face out of pity. Steve had his moments, but she truly believed he was a good boyfriend to Nancy, and didn't deserve that.

She turned around then to look at her cousin, absolutely baffled. Ringo knew something was going on from the funeral earlier, but she would never have expected this.

With a resounding exhale, she changed her clothes in the bathroom and went to sleep in her own cot, preparing the speech she was going to give to her cousin in the morning.

Hi again! I hope everyone liked this chapter x

candy95- I can definitely imagine it happening, it even still happens today! Not to worry though, with her, Steve, Nancy and Jonathan on the road to becoming a dream team she'll be okay! Thanks for reviewing x

harleyquinn87 - So so happy to hear that! Thank you! x

soylachicaimposible - Ahhhhh that's so so nice! Such a positive reaction, it really encourages me I always worry this story isn't that good but as long as people like it that's all that matters! x

10. Coke Wars

RINGO BARELY SLEPT THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT. She felt extremely uncomfortable with Jonathan in the room, and in Nancy's bed no less. When it came to 2am without a wink of sleep, she had huffed and grabbed her pillow and blanket, tramping downstairs to the basement to sleep there instead.

The basement was in complete disarray, almost trashed, but she was too tired to look more into it and fell asleep quickly on the couch, ignoring the carnage.

The second that morning light broke, however, she sneaked back upstairs before the rest of the house was awake. Ringo had waited *hours* now to lay into her cousin and Jonathan over their current situation, and was willing to sit on the chair in Nancy's room until they woke up. She stared at them pointedly, contemplating the speech she would give.

It didn't take them long to wake up after she sat down, probably feeling her piercing gaze on them. Nancy was the first to stir, with Jonathan following quickly after. She turned over in the bed, meeting Jonathan's tired eyes - the two of them shared a small smile, unaware of the hostile blonde mere metres away.

"I'm going to give you five minutes," Ringo's voice sounded out, causing them both to gasp in shock and shoot up in bed, absolutely mortified at seeing her sitting, staring at them. "Five minutes to get over your morning wood, and then you're going to get the hell out."

Jonathan nodded frantically, nervous by her presence and the fact he was caught in Nancy's bed. It certainly *looked* bad, but it was completely innocent.

"No, Ringo, you don't understand-" Nancy tried to explain, but Ringo was having none of it.

"I knew you two had something going on, I *knew* it," Ringo complained, looking back and forth between the two. "The longing stares in the hallway, the 'I need to be there for Jonathan'. And hey,

I'm not judging. But you should probably know, Steve seen you two in bed. Yeah, *Steve*. Your *boyfriend*, remember him?"

"Oh my god," Nancy whispered, her face reddening instantly as she cupped her forehead in horror. "But we didn't do anything! I swear! He was just... comforting me!"

"Ah yes," Ringo rolled her eyes stubbornly, waving her hands about as she spoke, "you see I, personally, would call getting a coffee, or having a long chat or just *hanging out* appropriate methods of *comforting*. Not sharing a bed."

"Why are you even defending Steve?" Nancy's tone changed from desperate to accusatory, she flung the blankets back off her body and climbed out of bed. "A month ago you absolutely hated him, and now you're yelling at me, your own cousin, *for* him?"

"He's my friend, Nancy," Ringo bit back defensively, "except our friendship doesn't involve climbing into bed together!"

"We didn't sleep together!" Nancy whisper-shouted, conscious that her room wasn't soundproof. "And even if we had, all you ever do is preach about 'embracing my sexuality', so stop being a hypocrite!"

Jonathan looked even more embarrassed as the conversation went on, awkwardly slipping out of bed and adjusting his clothes.

"Embracing your sexuality does not involve cheating on your partner! I couldn't give a shit if you fucked Jonathan six ways from Sunday but you're not that type of person that would hurt others, Nancy!"

"Nancy," Jonathan cut in, his eyes pleadingly looking at her. "Just tell her."

"Yes, Nancy," Ringo whirled back around to face her cousin, still sitting lazily in the chair. "Do tell!"

"Fine!" Nancy hissed in annoyance, moving to sit at the bottom of her bed. Jonathan followed suit, sitting next to her for support. Ringo narrowed her eyes, they looked like a married couple telling their child important news.

"There's this... this thing.." Nancy began, her defensive stature had suddenly broke down and she looked strangely sad. "It's... it's like a monster. We think that it... *took* Will and Barb."

"What do you mean?" Ringo asked disbelievingly. Nancy looked to Jonathan urgently, giving him a look that prompted him to take over.

"It started with the pictures I took, that night..." he trailed off awkwardly, Ringo looked away, not wanting to be reminded of the incident. "In one of the pictures I took of Barb, there was this- this thing in the background."

"Remember I told the police that there was something there when I went back the next day?" Nancy added, Ringo nodding in remembrance. "Well... last night we went to the woods, where I saw it. And I... went somewhere..."

"Where?" Ringo pressed, looking back and forth between the two for any sign of lying.

"I don't know- it was like, it was like the woods but it was dark. And it was cold. And that *thing* lived there. It was feeding on this animal..." Nancy looked absolutely traumatised, but Ringo still appeared apprehensive. "I guess if it feeds on things then... Will and Barb-"

"Hey," Jonathan turned to her, comfortingly placing his hand on her arm. Ringo watched the interaction curiously. "My mom said she talked to Will, alright? If he's alive there's a chance Barbara is too."

Ringo's eyes were wide, silently, she mouthed the words 'what the fuck' to herself. If Will was alive, who did they bury yesterday?

"But that means she's trapped in that place!" Nancy argued, her eyes wide with terror.

"Alright, back the hell up," Ringo intervened, absolutely baffled at this moment. "I need more details than that. I need to know what's going on."

Jonathan took over and explained everything they knew so far to Ringo. The entire tale was horrifying, but she was particularly

shocked when he happened to mention that Will was, in fact, not dead.

"Alright, then," Ringo stood up, clapping her hands once and reaching for her shoes by the door.

"What are you doing?" Nancy pried confusedly.

"We're going to go kill a demon," she shrugged, nestling her coat over her shoulders with a determined expression on her face.

"So you believe us?"

"I figured you wouldn't lie about Will and Barb," Ringo smiled softly, "and there's very little chance that you, Joyce and Jonathan have all gone batshit at the same time. And I've seen Alien, I'm ready to go Sigmund Weaver on this motherfucker."

"Wait, just wait a second," Nancy stopped her, thinking to herself. "I seen it feed on that deer, so it's a predator right? And it hunts alone, and at night, like a bear. Remember Barb cut herself at Steve's party? And last night, the deer.."

"It was bleeding too," Jonathan finished for her.

"Wait a sec," Nancy fished a book out from underneath her bed, flipping through the pages quickly.

"Damn, I'm glad my periods not due for another two weeks then," Ringo commented as she waited for Nancy's reveal, earning weird looks from the other two.

"Okay, look," Nancy stopped at a page, "sharks can detect blood in one parts per million. And they can smell it from a quarter mile away."

"What the hell?" Ringo muttered, "I used to go swimming at the beach all the time. Jesus Christ, why doesn't no one tell me this crap?"

"So you're saying it can detect blood?" Jonathan ignored Ringo's blabbering.

"It's just a theory."

"But we can test it, and that way if it comes, we'll be ready."

"Have we completely ruled out the possibility that this is Steve without his hair gel?" Ringo tilted her head, earning eye rolls once again.

As they sneaked out the window using the route that Steve had shown Ringo last night - she immediately made a mental note to call him later, a gleam of red and silver caught her eye in the neighbours yard.

Ringo's head turned in that direction, spotting an axe burrowed into a stump of a tree, stray logs beside it indicating that it was being used for chopping wood.

Upon noticing that the car in the owners driveway was gone, Ringo sprinted over to retrieve it, ignoring the complaints of her cousin and friend behind her. Lifting it from its place with some force, she ran back, giddily laughing, towards the group, hoping Jonathan's car was nearby so that she wouldn't look strange walking around with an axe.

Ringo sighed as she opened Jonathan's car door, clambering out of it quickly and being sure to leave her axe hiding beneath a blanket in the back seat.

She had chosen to wait in the car while Nancy and Jonathan went inside the weapons store, a decision she now came to regret. Ringo leaned against the side of the car and shuffled through her pockets, beaming when she located a couple of quarters.

The blonde marched down the street to the nearby convenience store, determined to buy a couple of cokes for what was sure to be a long night ahead. As she waited in line to pay, the small ding of the bell above the door caught her attention, in walking Jessica.

"Hey!" She beamed brightly, not having seen her friend in days. Jessica knew full well about the situation with Daniel however, they still stayed in contact over the phone.

"Hi girl," she returned her smile, approaching her as Ringo set the cokes down on the counter. "How you doing?"

"I'm good, and you?"

"Good, good. Hey, who's ass are we kicking over the slut shaming of your cousin?" She raised her eyebrows, confusing the other teenager entirely.

"What are you talking about?" Ringo asked, pocketing the change the clerk gave to her and grabbing the handles of her plastic bag.

"Oh my god," Jessica looked guilty for revealing the incident, "you haven't seen it?"

"Seen what, Jess?" Ringo pried, suddenly feeling slightly worried.

"The movie theatre..." Jessica trailed off regrettably. Ringo narrowed her eyes and stalked out of the store abruptly, her eyes fixed on the building across the street.

And sure enough, there it was. The words 'Nancy The Slut Wheeler' scrawled messily on the board next to a movie title, the same movie she had seen with Steve the night before.

The sound of laughter emanating from the alleyway met her ears, and Ringo sighed furiously, marching off in that direction immediately. She was absolutely seething with anger, her protectiveness of those that she cared about was one of her defining traits.

As she walked down, she immediately made out the figures of Tommy, Carol and Steve, the former of the three spraying something else on a wall, which indicated that he was the perpetrator.

The fact that Steve had obviously been somewhat involved had pissed her off even more.

"You're dead, Tommy!" Ringo shouted, tossing her bag of cokes to the ground and starting to run towards him.

"Hey!" Steve pushed forward and grabbed her, his arm wrapping around her waist and pulling her backwards, away from his friend.

"Get the hell off me!" She bellowed, shoving his arm away from her. "Who's side are you on?"

"Damn," Carol whistled, shoving her hands in her pockets and looking Ringo up and down, "Ashford was right. You *are* a psycho!"

"Stop it, Carol," Steve told her off, causing Ringo's eyes to narrow, not at all flattered by the gesture.

"What, so you can defend me but not your own girlfriend?" Ringo hissed angrily at him.

"Why don't you lay off, Ringo?" He fired back, looking bored all of a sudden, which only further infuriated her.

"Why are you doing this?" She dropped her voice lower, so the others couldn't hear. "We were friends, you know how much that word hurt me so why would you say it about Nancy?"

"Exactly. We were friends, and you're defending *her*. You saw what I saw last night," his voice was quieter too, but his tone still harsh none the less.

"But nothing even happened! He was just comforting her!"

"Yeah, I'm sure he was doing a lot of comforting," he rolled his eyes sarcastically.

"Harrington?" Tommy cut in, looking at the two of them with an expression of disgust. "Are you gonna get rid of her or what?"

Ringo turned back to look at Steve, raising her eyebrow in challenge.

"Go on then. Get rid of me."

Steve's mouth opened and closed as he tried to figure out what to say, looking back and forth between Tommy and Ringo, both of which he was now close to. He felt conflicted - Tommy had been his best friend since elementary, and if he didn't get rid of Ringo now then he would be teased relentlessly for it. On the other hand, Ringo was one of the most genuine people he had ever met, if he told her to go away now, that friendship would be severed entirely. He knew Ringo well

enough to know she would hold a grudge against him.

"Why don't I make the decision easy for you?" She muttered quietly, her expression blank and eyes cold as she turned and walked back up the alleyway, grabbing her bag along the way.

"But, wait," Carol called with a cheeky grin, "you never told us, is being a slut genetic then?"

Steve squeezed his eyes shut when Ringo stopped in her step, her body freezing completely, Carol only grinned wider at the reaction she received.

As she turned around slowly, Steve could see that she was visibly shaking with anger. It reminded him of her display at the game a few nights before, that single word was enough to instill the anger of a thousand suns in one of the most easy-going people he knew.

Reaching into her plastic bag, Ringo brought out a can of Coke and began to step closer and closer to the group once more. When she stopped in front of the redhead, she quickly brought the can forward and opened the tab, tossing it up so its sticky contents coated Carol's hair, face and clothes.

"What the hell!" She squealed, holding her arms up to block the drink. When the can's contents emptied, the blonde crunched the can inside her hand and tossed it mockingly at Carol's head, hitting against it with a soft 'ding' and falling to the ground.

"Okay, that's it!" Carol shouted, her joking manner completely dissipated as she shot forward and reached for the top of Ringo's head, gripping her hair between her fingers tightly.

"Woah, stop, stop!" Steve shouted, trying to get in between the two and dodge Ringo's legs that would continuously kick out at Carol. "Tommy, for god's sake, can you help?!"

"Nah, I'm enjoying this," he beamed, leaning back against the wall and watching the scene unfold.

Carol had a firm grip on her hair, but Ringo wasn't letting up, kicking at her legs hard enough to bruise her and swinging her arms around

to bash against her arms.

After finally being able to separate the two girls, both huffing and panting from the altercation, Ringo turned around and stormed off down the alleyway, marching past Nancy who was now on her way towards the gang.

He sighed at the coming altercation, his gaze drifting to the blonde who disappeared in the distance, a sense of guilt filling him. His own girlfriend was on her way to possibly hit him, or dump him, and all he could think about was the fact he had lost one of the few friends he had actually trusted.

I can't lie, I finished this chapter and edited it while drunk, so if there's a little typo anywhere please excuse my brain.

But anyways, I hope everyone liked this chapter! I couldn't just let Ringo let Steve away with it, she loves Nancy and hates slut shaming enough to go off at Steve I reckon!

Thanks so much to everyone who read and reviewed! 3

harleyquinn87 - It was the same for me! He won me over at the end of season 1, I actually kind of understood why Nancy stayed with him at the end. I know that's an unpopular opinion aha. Thanks so much!

candy95 - That was my intentions, to show a bit more of the human side to Steve in season one instead of the jock side to show why him and Ringo get along so well! You're right, the fight needed to happen like in the canon, but not to worry, they'll become the dream team soon enough, thanks for reviewing! x

Spacey - Awww thank you! They're definitely going to be fighting a demogorgan together soon enough!

itsreagann - That's what every writer wants to hear! Thanks so much I really appreciate your comment! x

soylachicaimposible - It's definitely going to be a slow build, or a

'Slow Ride' ;) okay I'm not funny I'll stop nowahaha. But yes, I really want them to bond as friends first so it's going to be a while before they get together, also because at this point Steve was really into Nancy and Nancy is Ringo's cousin/best friend so it wouldn't make sense for her to just up and get with Steve right now. Thanks for reviewing! x

11. Mumps

STEVE HARRINGTON THUMPED LOUDLY ON THE FRONT DOOR OF THE WHEELER RESIDENCE. Normally, he wouldn't be so eager to have to meet his girlfriend's parents. But as it turns out, he wasn't here to meet them formally - he was here for her blonde cousin who liked to tease his hair and show him how to be a better person.

He prayed beyond belief that Nancy wasn't here. He wasn't ready to see her just yet. Truthfully, he did feel bad for the entire incident, the embarrassment of it mixed with the hurt he felt over her spending time with Jonathan was enough to make him not yet ready to see her.

A woman he didn't know opened the door, looking at him in slight confusion. Her eyes scraped over his appearance and the plastic bag in his hand.

"Can I help you?" She asked politely. The longer he stood there, the more he noticed her similarities to Nancy. It was true, beauty was genetic.

"Y-yeah, is Ringo here? I'm a friend of hers," he stammered, his eyes looking over the woman's shoulders to locate the girl in question.

"A friend," Karen echoed with a smirk, wondering if this was the fellow Ringo went on a date with before. "She's in her room, it's the second door on the right."

Steve thanked her quickly, before rushing past her and jogging up the stairs to reach the room before anyone else could stop him.

"We keep the doors open in this house!" Karen called protectively up from the first floor, prompting Steve to chuckle in amusement. If only she knew how often he had been here already, and how he knew exactly which room was theirs.

Steve had the decency to knock beforehand, three quick raps against the door before opening it. Thankfully for them both, she was fully dressed and not in a compromising position. Instead, she was spread

out on her cot, headphones covering her ears and the faint sound of music emitting in the background.

Ringo had her eyes closed, but upon sensing a presence, opened them immediately and shot up in bed in fright at the sight of her guest.

The blonde teenager ripped the headphones from her head, throwing them onto her pillow and stood up abruptly. She began wagging her finger accusingly at him.

"Get out, now!" Ringo exclaimed, her voice thick with emotion.

"Ringo, please just hear me out," Steve begged, taking a step toward her which she instantly took backwards. "Look, I'm really sorry okay?"

"Oh, is this you saying it or Tommy?" She crossed her arms and raised her eyebrow boldly. Steve sighed and nodded his head in acceptance.

"Okay, I deserved that," he acknowledged, having accepted his cruel behaviour and been consumed with guilt on the car ride over.

"Just get out Steve," Ringo demanded, pointing towards the adjacent door again. "I don't want, or need, slut shaming assholes who won't make it past high school in my room."

Steve's expression faltered at that, gulping harshly, he felt truly offended by her words. It had been so long since she had looked at him with such contempt, he began to worry that their friendship wasn't salvageable at all.

"Do you really believe that?" He whispered, one of his worst fears coming to bite him in the form of her words. Picking up on his offence, Ringo paused, eyes narrowing in on his face. She looked ready to soften her approach, but instantly snapped out of it with a shake of her head.

"Why do you always care about what I think?" She hissed.

"Because I care about you."

This made her stop again, her mouth opening and closing like a fish.

Ringo blinked rapidly, suddenly feeling at a loss for words. He would have laughed, had the situation not been so desperate.

"You also care about Nancy, and look what happened there," she pointed out.

"I know. And I *really* regret it, okay? I like Nancy, and I shouldn't have let Tommy say those things, because I've seen first hand with you how damaging that kind of shame can be. Can't you see Ringo?" He pleaded, tossing the plastic bag onto her bed. "I haven't even known you long and you're one of the best friends I've ever had, because you're honest with me. And you keep me in line. I mean, fuck, I haven't even laughed as much in a long time as I do when I'm around you. Please don't throw that away."

"I didn't do anything," she denied quietly, her voice and demeanour noticeably quieter and calmer.

"Look," he began again, reaching for the bag on the bed and slowly holding it toward her. "You don't strike me as the type of girl to forgive someone because they buy her stuff, but either way, I want you to have this."

Her expression twisted in disagreement, not wanting to accept the gift at all. But curiosity got the better of her, and Ringo couldn't help but peer into the bag. At the sight of a vinyl inside, her heart leapt inside her chest. Her eyes glanced up to Steve's as she reached her hand in, pulling out the very thing she had been searching for, for half her life.

"Oh my god," she mumbled, tossing the now empty bag down to run her fingers over the cover, almost as if making sure it was real. He had rendered her absolutely speechless once again. "Where did you get it?"

"Well, after the last visit, I went into the store again the next day and asked the manager to specially order it in. It arrived today.." he trailed off awkwardly, feeling stupid now for making the effort at all if she as going to hate him.

"I know I'm mad at you but..." her voice cut off as she suddenly

started to squeal with excitement, literally jumping up and down on the spot. The brightest smile he had ever seen on anyone stretched across her face, which instantly made his heart soar.

"You're not cursed after all," he remarked with the smallest of smiles, causing her gaze to lift back up to him.

In the second it took her to calm down, Ringo had an internal debate with herself. On one hand, what Steve done was despicable. The stuff of bullies and assholes and everyone she hated in the world. On the other, he was clearly regretful of his actions. Steve was right about one thing, she wouldn't readily forgive for presents. But this wasn't just a gift, it was a true act of kindness on his behalf.

"Well.. this may have made me feel better, *but*," he raised his eyebrow at her pause, lifting her finger into the air again, "you have to beg for Nancy's forgiveness. And Jonathan's. You still fucked up."

"Yeah, I know," he mumbled, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly. "That might be a little difficult right now, because I think- uh... I think Jonathan might have been arrested."

"He *what*?" She bellowed, serene expression falling to one of livid anger. "What the hell Steve?"

"Well, I mean look at my face, he got caught hitting me," Steve gestured to the swollen lumps that were taking over his cheek and eye, which she had promptly ignored until now to avoid feeling sorry for him.

"And you didn't hit back?" She crossed her arms over her chest sassily, after gently placing the vinyl down as if it were made of the most delicate material.

"Well... I did, but I was smart enough to run away when I seen the cops landing!" Steve protested, scoffing as if he were innocent.

"So they're at the police station," Ringo trailed off, thinking about what they had planned to carry through with before the interruption. At the very least, she hadn't missed it and could now partake as planned.

"Steve, I need you to take me to-" her voice was cut off by the sound of cars outside, more cars than what was considered normal for a small suburban neighbourhood.

Her eyebrows furrowed in confusion, stepping towards the window to gaze out. Upon seeing that the flurry of vehicles had stopped right in their front yard, and that some very official-looking individuals were walking to the front door, Ringo's heart dropped.

"Shit," she hissed, standing up straight and backing way, running her hands through her hair. Steve was confused by her sudden, onset panicking.

"Who are those guys? They don't look like cops," Steve questioned, his face nearly pressing against the glass to see out.

"Are you stupid, mumps?" She whisper-shouted, gripping him by the bicep and dragging him out of sight roughly. "We have to get out of here!"

"What do you- why?" He was suddenly suspicious of her, looking her over. "Ringo, are you... are you in trouble?"

"No, I'm not," she sighed, sneaking a glance out the window. There was no way they could escape through it in broad daylight, especially since the window faced the front of the house and they would have been easily seen. "But I think I know why they're here."

"What's going on?" He pressed, his eyes narrowing at her frantic state. Ringo didn't answer, her head snapping up when she heard the door bell ring out through the house.

"The back door! Let's go!" She hushed, reaching for his hand and beginning to run out of the bedroom, dragging the teenager along with her. Their footsteps were loud on the stairs, but nobody had entered the house yet.

"Can you kids calm down?" Ted Wheeler rounded the corner, his voice sounding as bored as always, looking at the two with suspicion, "it's like a damn herd of baby elephants coming for some water!"

"Sorry, Ted," Ringo muttered, rounding around the corner of the

staircase and heading towards the kitchen before Ted could open the front door. Steve had finally shaken himself awake, and was now intent on escaping the house like Ringo was - although for what reason, he knew not of.

The blonde grasped for the brass knob desperately just as she heard a new voice echo down the hallway, yanking the door open as silently but as quickly as she possibly could have. However, the second the outside air hit them, so did the image of a strange woman standing there, blocking their exit.

The middle aged lady smiled, although it came across as wicked instead of welcoming, taking it upon herself to step inside past the dumbstruck duo.

"Hello! I wasn't quite sure if your household preferred using the front door or the back, it's impossible to tell these days," she spoke with an eerily calm voice, which only added to her overall creepiness. "Ringo, is it?"

The girl in question looked towards Steve with widened eyes, before returning her gaze and nodding her head slightly.

"We'd like to ask you a few questions, if you don't mind."

Karen and Ted were being interviewed in the dining room, while the woman - who had now identified herself as Diane, took the two teenagers into the living room for their questioning.

Steve's knee bobbed anxiously, but Ringo was even more nervous than he was. Because she had an idea of what this was about.

The entire house was being searched over by a flurry of men in suits, occasionally they would box items and carry them out to their respective van. The idea of them searching through her belongings made her tense, and she hoped that Nancy didn't hold any evidence of the previous night's indiscretions.

"So, are you two together?" Diane gestured between the both of them, causing them to chuckle awkwardly.

"God, no," she shook her head hard enough for her hair to flick. "Just friends."

"Yeah, just friends," he nodded in agreement.

"Alright then," the elder woman reached into her briefcase and brought out a small photo, passing it over to Ringo to inspect. "Ringo, I need to know if you've ever seen this girl."

Her blood instantly ran cold with recognition. She very much did recognise her. After all, this was the girl Mike and his friends had rescued, the one she intended to help herself. Perhaps, the girl had run away from the police station where she had went to?

Either way, Ringo wasn't prepared to reveal that detail any time soon. She didn't trust the woman as far as she could throw her, and didn't want to put a girl's life in danger if that was the case.

"I'm not sure," she acted, tilting her head to the side and over-dramatically narrowing her eyes. "Steve, have you seen her before?"

"Nope, never," he replied honestly, baffled by her display.

"She doesn't look familiar, sorry," Ringo shrugged, handing her back the photograph. The sound of Karen yelling through the walls captured the three's attention, making the situation so much more heightened.

"So, you're telling me you *haven't* seen her in the last few weeks?"

"Don't think so," Ringo answered vaguely. "Why? What has she done? Who is she?"

"I can't answer that," Diana cryptically spoke, placing the picture back inside its holding in her briefcase. It was clear the woman was frustrated with Ringo's lack of compromise.

"Then answer this," she sat forward, fed up from playing nice. "Why are there probably five grown ass men looking through my underwear drawer right now?"

"Miss Wheeler," Diana turned back, her expression stoic, "have you

any idea where Michael may have gone with his friends?"

"I can't answer that," she fired back, mimicking the woman's earlier response.

"Miss Wheeler," she sighed in frustration, "I understand your apprehension. But Michael is in *extreme* danger, and we're only trying to help."

"Help yourself to the sight of my ass walking out the door," Ringo huffed, shooting up from the couch, not waiting for Steve to follow. She headed straight for the adjacent front door, with her friend hot on her heels.

"Miss Wheeler!" She heard shouts of behind her, but she didn't pay any attention, continuing to march across the lawn and towards Steve's car.

"Jesus, Ringo! Wait!" Steve huffed, struggling to catch up with her as he fumbled out of the doorway. "I don't want to get shot!"

The pair entered the car in their respective sides, buckling their seatbelt as Steve reversed away from the parking spot - just narrowly missing one of the black cars parked behind.

"Okay! What the hell is going on!" He shouted out of nowhere, whipping his head back and forth to look between Ringo and the road.

"Nothing! I don't know what she's talking about!" Ringo denied, her voice equally as loud.

"That's a load of bull and you know it! Those guys weren't Hawkins cops, Ringo! They looked like the freakin' FBI!"

"Don't you think I know that!" She shouted exasperatedly, tucking her hair behind her ears. "Can you just, please, take me to Jonathan Byers?"

"Ringo-"

"Please!"

"Alright," he resolved out of sake for her sanity, taking the next turn, his face screwed up as if he had sucked on a lemon.

"Nobody's home, Ringo, can we just go?" Steve rolled his eyes after the blonde knocked *again*. They arrived almost ten minutes before then, and Steve's reluctance to go near the residence dissolved upon discovering nobody had even been there to welcome him.

"Well then, where are they?" She grunted in frustration, turning around to face him and leaning back against the aged front door.

"I don't know, maybe still at the police station?" He suggested, looking up at the darkening skies overhead.

"Well then, where am I going to go?" She shouted, anxiety and fear instantly flooding her system, which Steve took note of instantly. "I can't go home with those *people* there!"

"Hey, hey, don't worry," he soothed, stepping up onto the front porch and placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. "You can come back to mine until tonight, okay?"

"Really?" She quaked, her voice dropping to a whisper. Her expression looked so innocent at that moment, he felt nothing but pity for her, even though she refused to tell him what was going on.

"Of course, doll," he moved his hand to wrap his arm around her shoulder comfortably, using it to lead her back towards his car. "You can stay as long as you need."

I just realised how close season 1 is to ending in this narrative and I'm starting to panic. Not to worry though, this will carry on between and through to season 2!

Thanks so much to everyone who read and/or reviewed!

IsJustMe - That's such a compliment honestly! Creating OCs is tough and I didn't want her to be too perfect but I also wanted her to be relatable as hell. So thank you! She'll be with Steve for now, until Steve goes to Jonathan's house, so Ringo will miss the whole bathtub

thing with the rest of them. Thanks for reviewing!

candy95 - Thanks so much! I hope she doesn't feel like an outsider when you read it!

- Ahhhh thanks! I love being able to write her interactions with the family and Steve and I'm glad you like it!

harleyquinn87 - I don't think anyone really wants Steve and Nancy! Which is great so I can make room for Ringo ;) thanks so much and have a great day!

Guest - Thanks love! Here's an update, I hope you like x

12. Wild Thing

"**HERE, NO SUGAR, RIGHT?**" Steve reappeared in the living room, carrying a mug filled with coffee that made Ringo's heart leap with joy.

"Yes, thank you," she practically moaned, taking the warm cup and curling her legs underneath her on the couch, eagerly taking a sip of the hot beverage. Steve moved to sit beside her, watching her from the corner of his eye as her gaze wandered around the living room.

The last time she had been inside this room in particular, she had just woken up - still drunk and with a hangover just beginning to boot. The decor of the place was hardly something on her mind at that point in time, but now, she could take it all in. And it was starting to freak her out just how *rich* Steve was.

"What's your place like back home?" He asked out of the blue, probably making conversation to break the silence, although it was a comfortable one.

"Well, our trailer is probably the size of this room so," she joked with a shrug. "It's okay, all I need is my cassette player, my vinyls and the tree nearby the park that has a tire swing in it. I don't need anything else."

"Do you miss it?" He pressed, moving to sit more comfortably by lifting his feet and placing them on the coffee table. Ringo mulled his question over for a minute.

"Not really," she admitted quietly. "Does that make me a bad person? Fuck. I just.. my parents fight a lot. About money and... everything. It's nice to be somewhere normal for once."

Steve, sensing her discomfort, decided to change the subject.

"So," he slipped his hand into her coat pocket and tugged out the cassette player that was on show. How she managed to fit it in there at all, he'd never know. "What other songs are on this ass-kicking mix of yours?"

"Nothing you're into I'm sure, Tom Cruise," she poked fun at his earlier comment of looking like Stefan, leaning her head back against the sofa and watching him with a soft smile as he opened up the tape compartment.

Steve let out a chuckle again when he read the title of the tape once more, eliciting a slap on his arm from the girl in point. He inserted it back in its rightful place again, except this time he flipped it around to B-Side and hit play, slipping her headphones over his head.

The teenager's eyes widened dramatically at the opening chords, Ringo beamed instantly, well aware that track one on that side of the tape was 'Wild Thing' by the Troggs.

"Now this," he shot up from his seat, clipping the player onto his belt, "this is a golden oldie!"

"What are you doing?" She giggled, watching with amusement as he smoothed his hair back and started to jut his hips back and forth to the beat of the song.

"*Wild thing!*" He shouted suddenly, completely off-key and pointing directly at the blonde, who was still sitting, gobsmacked, on the couch. "*You make my heart sing!*"

"You're such a dork!" She squealed with laughter.

"*Wild thing, I think I love you,*" he trailed on, lifting his foot up onto the coffee table and resting his elbow on his knee, "*but I wanna know for sure!*"

Ringo howled again as he suddenly shot his pelvis forward and removed his leg, the performance made all the more amusing by the fact his face was covered in cuts and lumps.

The song eventually came to an end, and Ringo's sides were almost split from laughing so hard. Her earlier worries and troubles had been well forgotten, and for a moment, she was just a teenager again enjoying the company of her friend.

When the last few notes rang through Steve's ears, he took an overly dramatic bow, which was met with clapping and cheering from

Ringo.

"Yeah, sexy lady!" She hollered at him, "shimmy over this way, I have a dollar!"

"How very dare you," he cocked his hip to the side and pouted his swollen lips, his voice ten octaves higher to mimic a woman, "I take fives and tens *only*."

"You'll take what I give you!" She, in turn, deepened her voice as if she were a man in the fake scenario.

Steve was grinning widely when he moved to sit back down, taking the headphones from his head and passing them and the cassette player back to its owner.

"Here, ass kicker."

Ringo diligently wrapped her headphone cord up before placing it delicately inside her pocket, followed by the player itself. A thought suddenly coming to her as she done so.

"Hey, Steve? Where's your parents?" She couldn't believe she hadn't noticed before, but the house was completely vacant since she arrived, and it was now dark outside.

"My mom's vacationing in Mexico City and my dad's working I guess," he said it so casually, as if it were a common occurrence. Ringo came to realise that it probably was. This was another classic case of rich parents that pried their child full of expensive presents to make up for their obvious absence.

"Oh," she said dumbly, not sure of what else to say.

"But hey, on the bright side, I can do that without getting caught," he gestured with his head towards the centre of the living room, where he had been dancing just moments before.

"I would have covered for you, told them that you had a bee in your panties," she smiled tiredly at her joke, the tiredness she had been trying to ignore was creeping up on her. But she couldn't afford to fall asleep, after all, she was only here for a few hours - not for the

night. Just long enough to be sure that the Byers would finally be home, and hopefully Nancy would be with them.

"My dad's pretty homophobic too, so I think he'd freak out and think dancing means I'm gay," Steve muttered, embarrassed of the revelation about his father.

"Fuck him, just for that-" she broke off mid-sentence to yawn, "just for that, I'm going to eat spicy food, use his ensuite bathroom and not flush the toilet."

"Ringo," he belted out a laugh, his eyes closed as his head fell back with mirth, "that's absolutely disgusting."

When silence fell over them again, Steve used to it to truly think about his father. Sometimes he wondered if his desire to be so popular stemmed from his father's push for him to be so. He turned to voice his thoughts to Ringo, knowing that she would listen and offer her opinion, but when his head lifted he saw that she was fast asleep.

Smirking softly at her sleeping face, which consisted of her mouth falling slightly open as her face pressed against the back of the couch, he reached for the blanket that hung over the other couch in the room and draped it around her body to keep her warm.

Ringo's eyes fluttered open at the sensation of movement underneath her face. Confused, she tiredly lifted her head to inspect what kind of contraption she had managed to fall asleep on now. Her eyes widened slightly in shock upon seeing that it was actually someone's shoulder, and the shoulder of Steve Harrington at that.

"Shit," she swore, sitting up straight and scraping her hand through her hair. She hadn't meant to fall asleep. Desperately, the blonde looked for a clock in the room, and cursed louder upon seeing that it was just ten minutes before midnight.

"Steve! Wake up!" She shook his shoulder harshly, shooting up from her seat and slipping her shoes on quickly over her feet.

"Shut up," he mumbled exhaustedly, turning around and burying his face into the couch cushion out of stubbornness.

"No, really! Get up, please! I need a ride to Jonathan's!" Ringo begged, tucking her blonde locks behind her ears.

"Ringo," he huffed, refusing to budge, "whatever it is, it'll be fine until the morning."

"It won't be," she denied in desperation, biting her lip in frustration before throwing her hands into the air, "okay, I'm just gonna have to walk."

This got his attention, instantly waking him up enough to open his eyes and stand up from the couch.

"Not a chance in hell," he scoffed, stretching out his long limbs and grabbing the keys from the coffee table. "Lets go, I'm giving you a ride."

Ringo almost broke the handle off of the car door when they arrived at the Byers, out of eagerness to get out. Lights could be seen streaming through the windows - meaning that *someone* was awake. Before she could jet off however, Steve's voice stopped her.

"I need to apologise..." Steve began, looking remorseful as he switched the engine off and stared off into the distance at Jonathan's house, Ringo's eyes widened at the revelation.

"What, now? No, not now! Now isn't a good time! Do it tomorrow!" She rambled, lifting one leg out of the car, but once again - she was stopped by him.

"I have to do it now, Ringo. I'm already here so it makes sense," he ignored her protests, earning a groan from the blonde after he slid out of the vehicle and started to march determinedly up to the front door.

Ringo jogged so she could move in front of him and be the first to knock, out of politeness. She gestured with her hand for Steve to take a few steps back, just in case, which he obliged - albeit confusedly.

When no one answered for a second, Ringo was so wound up she couldn't help but shout through the wooden door.

"Guys, open up! It's Ringo!" She pleaded, hoping that it was her cousin and her cousin's new 'friend' that was inside. But she would even settle for Joyce, right now.

"And Steve!" Steve shouted from behind her, much to her annoyance as she threw him a glare. "I just wanna talk!"

Nancy Wheeler slipped the chain from the front door and opened it a sliver, just enough to give her cousin narrowed eyes and nod her head, signalling her to enter. The second Ringo slid through the gap, Nancy slid the chain back on and shut it tight, ready to ignore Steve Harrington, who was waiting on the front lawn.

But of course, his fists only pounded on the door again. The incessant banging was only driving Nancy mad, so she had no choice but to open it again to tell him off.

"Steve, you need to leave!" Nancy told him firmly, and Ringo had to applaud her resolve. This was clearly a different Nancy from what she had seen the last few weeks.

"Nancy?" He asked in confusion, before brushing that aside when he saw that she was going to close the door again. "I'm not trying to start anything, okay?"

"I don't care about that, you need to leave-"

As they bickered on, Ringo's eyes zeroed in on the bandage wrapped around the smaller girl's hand. She was beginning to worry, just as Jonathan came and stood by her side, until she noticed he had an identical cover. Ringo couldn't help but wonder if she had missed all the action already.

Now that her gaze was drawn from the scene at the door, her eyes trailed around the room, which was immensely decorated with fairy lights, accompanied by a slathering of the alphabet painted messily on one wall. But Ringo didn't ask, assuming there was a meaning behind it that they'd explain later. When Steve left.

"No, no, no, no," Steve stammered, emotionally. "Listen, I-I messed up. I messed up. I messed up, okay?"

Nancy tried to shut the door, but his foot was wedged in the gap and preventing that from happening.

"Really, please. I just want to make things right. Okay? Please?"

There was something about the scene that irked Ringo. Originally, she had thought it was because they were about to summon some kind of animal that could kill them all and Steve was only delaying that. But now, as he begged Nancy for a chance to redeem himself, Ringo realised it was because she didn't approve of their relationship.

Even if Ringo had gotten over the cinema incident, Nancy was his girlfriend, and his willingness to hurt her was a sign to Ringo they weren't a good match. It wasn't even a case of opposites don't attract - because she firmly believed that they do, but Ringo just didn't necessarily mean that Steve and Nancy were one of those couples. As far as she could see, since Ringo arrived their relationship had become a consistent cycle of hurting the other person or getting into an argument because they were *expecting* to get hurt. The lack of trust was obvious.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Steve's next words, which had prompted Jonathan and Ringo to share a panicked look in the confines of the house that Steve couldn't see.

"Hey, what happened to your hand?" He questioned, his voice thick with worry all of a sudden. "Is that blood?"

"No, nothing. It was an accident," Nancy ripped her arm out of view, and threw a desperate glance towards her cousin for her help.

"No, what's going on?" Steve's voice had turned from pleading to protective. "Where did Ringo go?"

"Nothing happened and I'm right here!" The blonde interjected, shuffling up to show her face at the gap in the door right next to Nancys.

Steve instantly picked up on her panicked demeanour, and combined

with Nancy's injury - it was enough to set off alarm bells in his head.

"Wait a second- did he do this to you?" His voice *then* turned from worried to angry as he pried his way past Nancy and Ringo through the front door, despite their best protests and efforts to keep him back.

The scene inside stopped his warpath the second he encountered it, his mouth gaping open as he looked around at the scene inside the house.

"What is-" he began, until he saw the gun and axe laying in the coffee table in the living room, "what the fuck?"

"You need to get out of here," Jonathan finally intervened, claspings the taller man's shoulders tightly to push him towards the exit.

"Woah- what is all this?" He grabbed Jonathan's arms to prevent from being shoved.

"Listen to me, I'm not asking you-"

"What is that smell?! Is that gasoline?" He yelled in horror, and Ringo wondered if she should interject again. But what could she possibly have said to explain the situation? His questions would only be directed towards her then.

"Steve," Nancy's voice, accompanied by the safety click of a gun, caught everyone's attention, especially since she was aiming it right at him. "Get out."

"Nancy!" Ringo screamed, wanting to shove her cousin and rip the weapon from her hands. She knew that Nancy would never have fired it, but she also knew that guns went off by accident all the time.

"*What?!*" Steve shouted, Jonathan throwing himself out of the line of fire a few feet away from him. "What is going on?!"

"You have five seconds to get out of here!" Nancy persisted, ignoring Ringo's pleas.

"Put it down, now!" Ringo roared angrily at her, this was going way too far and her best friend wasn't going to die because of it.

"Is this a joke?! Stop! Put the gun down!"

The entire situation blinded the two cousins and Steve to the fact that the Christmas lights were now flickering behind them.

"Three," Nancy began to count.

"Nancy, stop!"

"No! Stop!"

"Nancy!" Jonathan bellowed to get her attention, "the lights!"

On cue, the two girls whipped around to see that the bulbs had begun to flicker furiously, something that horrified Nancy and Jonathan.

"Wait! What does that mean?" Ringo cut in, starting to back away from it out of fear.

"It's here, Ringo!" Jonathan informed her, prompting the blonde to instantly reach for the axe she had earlier procured from her neighbours garden.

"What's here?" Steve demanded, being completely ignored by the trio.

"Where is it?" Nancy quaked, backing up until her back was against Jonathan's. Ringo moved to stand beside Steve, not so that he would protect her, but so that she could protect him as she raised her axe up slightly to hold it correctly.

"Woah! Be careful with that!"

"I don't know where it is!" Jonathan called out, their shouts only heightening the tension in the room.

"Hello! Will someone please explain to me-" Steve thundered, but however loud his voice was, it wasn't as loud as the sudden cracking of wood that quite literally split through the house.

The four of them turned instantly to the ceiling across the room, which was now being shredded through by something they were unable to see fully yet.

Ringo involuntarily screamed, shouting over and over again, "oh, holy fuck!" Nancy began to shoot blindly, hoping to hit her target before it was too close to be killed.

Jonathan wrapped his arm around her waist to stop her so they could execute their plan, and dragged her away, shouting, "go! Go! Run!"

Ringo didn't need to be told twice, instantly she turned around and booked it down the hallway, letting out another scream when she almost stood right into a bear trap in the hall. But her high pitched screams were drowned out by Steve's, as they all ran into the bedroom down the hall and firmly shut the door behind them.

Another chapter and the dream team is coming together!

Random note: I don't usually listen to Drake but does anyone else get Stranger Things vibes from his song featuring Michael Jackson called Don't Matter To Me? I'm just gonna go ahead and make that Stingo's song.

Thanks so much to everyone who read and/or reviewed!x

harleyquinn87 - That's great to hear! I hope you liked this chapter and what's to come! x

candy95 - Such a relief for you to say that, honestly! I hope you liked what went down and some Stingo banter before they teamed up with Nancy and Jonathan. Have a nice day x

PsychoBeachGirl88 - Ahhh this made me so happy! I'm soooo touched by your opinion of Ringo, it's every writers dream to hear that people react positively to their OC! I can't wait for them to realise that either ;) Thank you so so much for your review! x

13. Mystery Inc

"Jesus! What the hell was that? What the hell was that?" Steve screamed for what seemed like the millionth time, backing into the bedroom with the girls as Jonathan made sure the door was shut and secured tightly.

"Shut up!" Nancy and Jonathan whirled around and yelled simultaneously, while Ringo decided to take a less offensive approach. She felt partly guilty that he was here in the first place - after all, if she hadn't made him give her a ride to the Byers he wouldn't even be here.

"It's a big scary monster thing!" Was unfortunately all she could come out with at that moment, the sounds of screeching echoing through the wooden door causing her heart to hammer in her chest. It was a sound unlike any animal she had ever heard and sounded throughout the entire house.

Despite the differences between the four of them, they all huddled together and glared intensely at the door, ready to jump should it burst through the wood and reach them. Jonathan held a lighter in the air - for what reason, Ringo wasn't aware of, but she didn't fail to notice the series of traps set up on her journey to the bedroom. Nancy clutched the gun tightly in her hand, making Steve wonder where on Earth she got it, and how she felt comfortable enough to use it. Ringo held the biggest weapon of all, the wooden handle of her axe was gripped tightly in her hand.

The creature's screeching began to quiet down, but its breathing could still be heard from the other side, mixing in with the sounds of their quick panting.

"What's it doing?" Nancy demanded, straightening the arm that held the gun.

"How the hell should I know?" Ringo fired back, throwing all manners out the window from the stress of the situation.

The lights in the house had been steadily fluttering since *it* had

arrived, but with a sudden jolt, it stopped flickering and the lights now permanently remained on. The house was completely silent.

"Do you hear anything?" Nancy whispered to them, not daring to move her eyes from the door.

"No," Jonathan snapped his lighter shut, prompting the rest of the group to finally take a breath. Reaching down to pick up a modified baseball bat that he had left on the floor, Jonathan raised it high and moved towards the door. It looked as if he had hammered a box of nails through the wood for maximum effect.

"Are you crazy?" Ringo whisper-shouted, her eyes wide as she watched Nancy follow his lead and head towards the hallway.

"How about we *don't* go straight towards the big monster thing, guys?" Steve echoed, shuffling in so he was beside Ringo, their shoulders brushing against the others.

But their complaints fell on deaf ears, Ringo let out a huff of frustration as she was forced to follow after her cousin and friend into the hallway. The second she rounded the door frame, she peered down, but the monster was nowhere to be seen. Her eyes fell to the bear trap that sat on the floor, completely untouched.

"Is it gone?" Nancy murmured, but Jonathan didn't answer, because it more than likely wasn't.

Ignoring the shake of his hands as he gripped the bat, he persevered down the hallway slowly, the three of them following after, dutifully. Steve felt awfully under-equipped being the only one without a weapon.

When they reached the living room and were reassured that the coast was clear, Ringo sighed and let her axe fall from the air, holding it down beside her leg.

"Well, that'll teach him to mess with Mystery Inc.," she muttered, looking around at the ground for any sign of footprints. Or paw prints. Or hooves.

"Mystery Inc.?" Jonathan rolled his eyes, "really, Ringo?"

Nancy stayed silent, she knew Ringo long enough to know that her humour was a mechanism she employed to hide her fear or nervousness. And technically she wasn't exactly far off, they were a lot like the Scooby Doo gang - all they needed was a dog.

The distraction from Ringo's comment had shifted their attention from the fact that Steve was having a minor breakdown behind them. Now that he could see his life wasn't in immediate danger, the reality of the situation hit him at full force.

"This is crazy, this is actually crazy, this is crazy," he muttered to himself over and over, an amused undertone in his voice as if he couldn't quite grasp the fact that this wasn't a practical joke Ringo had led him into as revenge for the cinema incident. As he continued to repeat the phrase, his voice quickly descended from amused to outright panicked, encouraging him to reach for the telephone on the wall.

"Hey!" Ringo shouted to capture their attention, "quick! Steve's snitching!"

Nancy marched up to her boyfriend, or perhaps her ex - none of them were quite sure, and snatched the phone straight from his hand, flinging it to the ground.

"What are you doing? Are you insane?" He begged desperately, Ringo's heart clenching at the sight.

"It's going to come back!" Nancy shouted. "So you need to leave. Right now."

Steve wanted nothing more than to sprint out of the front door and never think about this incident again, but he just couldn't leave without her.

"Ringo," he turned to the blonde, stood a few feet away, "come on, please. I'm not leaving you here."

She looked surprised at his words, her mouth falling open slightly as her eyes glanced back and forth between Steve and her cousin. Nancy looked slightly offended, but for only a second. There were far more

important matters at hand than the fact her possible ex-boyfriend wanted her cousin out of danger instead of her.

"Steve," she began, trailing towards him with a sheepish expression, "I can't leave them. Just go, okay? I'll call you later, if I.. you know."

He knew exactly what she meant. *If* she made it to later.

"I can't leave you here, please just get in the car and come with me," he begged her, his gaze pleading with hers. Ringo could only shake her head sadly.

"I can't."

Steve stayed for a few seconds, staring at her and hoping she would change her mind, but it became clear eventually that she wouldn't. Nancy placed her hands on his chest impatiently, and started to shove him towards the front entrance. Steve's flight response kicked in then, as he grabbed the door handle and roughly pulled it open, practically sprinting towards his car.

With absolute terror consuming him, he tried to shove his keys into the door, but his hands shook too terribly to get it right on the first try. When he finally unlocked it, he swung it open and almost leaped inside - but the sight of an object on the passenger car seat stopped him in his tracks. He recognised it instantly as Ringo's cassette player, which probably held her infamous mix tape inside of it. More than likely, it fell from her pockets as she was getting out of the car. Or perhaps she trusted him enough to take care of it while she handled what was going on inside.

His heart lurched in his chest with guilt, Steve's mind screamed at him to turn back and drag her from the house, kicking and screaming. He would rather have her hate him than let her be harmed. As he was having this internal debate, flickering in the corner of his eye caught his attention, and he turned his head to see that the lights inside the Byers house had begun to violently jerk on and off once again- which made his mind up for him.

The atmosphere in the living room had just begun to calm down until the electricity in the house was on the fritz again. Instantly, they

raised their weapons and retreated back into each other, turning around on the spot so that it wouldn't get the chance to sneak up on them from behind.

"Where is it?" Nancy pressed, her voice was high and frightened and for a second, she sounded like the child she truly was.

"Come on, you son of a bitch," Jonathan taunted, his grip on the bat so tight his knuckles turned white.

"Come on!" Ringo screamed, fed up with the building tension and the anxiety. But after her shout, the lights had switched off completely, plunging them into the darkness. Nancy whimpered in fright, and Ringo's body began to shiver violently.

A low, grumbling growl could be heard behind them, the Wheeler girls turned to find its source and just about made out the shape of the creature by the moonlight streaming through the window.

"Jonathan!" They yelled simultaneously, but it was still too late, the creature had wrestled Jonathan down to the ground and was currently hovering on top of him.

Ringo was completely frozen in horror as its mouth opened out, ready to devour Jonathan's head by the looks of it. She was only broken out of her stance at the sound of Nancy shooting at it, but that didn't look to have much of an effect on the creature, except to take its attention away from Jonathan. Finally, Ringo broke out of her fear and stepped forward, lifting the axe and whirling it through the air, embedding the blade into its shoulder.

The demon screamed in pain, the axe was stuck in its body and Ringo could only back away out of its immediate reach before it could grab her, not having the chance to grab it back. Now left completely defenceless, she continued walking backwards, eyes filling with tears as it advanced towards her. The blonde let out a soft cry of surprise when her back met the wall, now she was completely trapped by both her fear and the monster in front of her. Nancy had continued to shoot, but the tell-tale clicking sound told them she had just run out of bullets.

Terrified, Ringo shut her eyes closed and prepared for impact, but instead, the sound of a grunt and contact with something met her ears. Her eyes snapped open, drinking in the image before her of her best friend, who was now hitting the creature with the nailed bat Jonathan had dropped.

"Steve!" Ringo exclaimed in relief, watching with shock as the man in question was expertly belting the demon with the bat. She noticed he was leading the it back into the hallway. As it plunged forward, desperate to get at Steve but being stopped by his hits, the axe fell from its shoulder to the ground with a clang. Instantly, Ringo dived forward for it and lifted it up again. Now that she was facing its back, she felt less afraid to wield it against the thing.

Ringo swung the axe, this time slicing it through its side with a sickening crunch. It squealed louder in agony as she ripped it out, deciding to never let go of the weapon again. With that distraction, Steve lifted his bat and whacked the brute under its chin, forcing it to stumble backwards and straight into the trap.

"He's in the trap!" Jonathan howled as he scampered off of the ground, "Ringo and Steve, move back!"

Steve instinctively wrapped his arm around her middle and dragged her backwards, just as Jonathan moved in front of them and lit his lighter once more, letting it fall to the ground and igniting flames to take its place. The fire flooded through the hallway and reached the creature within milliseconds.

The gang watched as the creature screamed in agony, Steve and Ringo didn't yet notice that his arm was still wrapped around her and that she was backing into his chest for safety. Deciding to stop the fire before it burned his house down, Jonathan reached for the extinguisher and angled its nozzle down the hallway.

When the fire successfully went out, they were left coughing with the smoke from the flames, Ringo dragged her t-shirt up to cover her mouth and nose as they moved closer to where the creature had been trapped. But of course, it was gone. Leaving singed meat and an empty, sizzling bear trap in its absence.

"Where did it go?" Nancy questioned.

"Jesus Christ, if it isn't dead by now then I'm hanging up my axe and accepting sweet death," Ringo moaned, voice muffled by her t-shirt.

"It has to be dead," Jonathan replied exasperatedly.

They might not have been sure if it was alive or not, but one thing they were certain of was that it definitely wasn't with them now.

"Phew," Ringo let out a puff of air, "nice one, Shaggy."

Her eyes trailed down and suddenly she had realised that Steve was still holding on to her, and that she was subconsciously leaning into his touch. The contact made her freeze, which brought their stance to Steve's attention too. Immediately, they practically jumped apart from one another as if they had been electrocuted.

Nancy watched the interaction from the corner of her eye, suspicion and doubt filling her mind now that there wasn't a demon trying to kill her as a distraction.

"Wait," Jonathan called out suddenly, the groups heads snapping forward to see that some of the lights were lit up again. The sudden surge of electricity followed down the hallway, lighting up no more than a bulb or two at a time. It was undeniable, the difference in the air this time.

Steve took point with the bat and followed it, prepared for yet another battle. But Jonathan knew better, he wasn't frightened at all of the sudden presence.

"Mom?" He whispered, catching everyone's attention. Ringo narrowed her eyes in confusion.

"Your mom was here the whole time and didn't fucking help?" She demanded.

"No," he grunted in offence, pointing towards the lights, "I think she just arrived."

In a daze, Jonathan followed after the trail left, quietly murmuring to

his mother. Nancy was the only one who understood, knowing full well about the other dimension by now. But of course, Ringo and Steve had missed out on the last few hours.

Because they were together, a small voice in her head added.

Jonathan continued on none the less, the rest following after him until he was stood outside, staring intently at the street lamp that had now began to flicker as well.

"Where's it going?" Nancy asked.

"I don't think that's the monster," was all Jonathan could reply.

We're coming towards the end of season one now, but not the end of the book don't worry! Slow Ride will continue on to season 2. This chapter was a little shorter, but I didn't want to rush the end of the season as it's only now that Ringo and Steve are finally becoming closer together. Maybe a little closer than just friends?

Thanks so much to everyone who read and/or reviewed!

Isjustme - I hope it lived up to your expectations! 3

harleyquinn87 - Ahhhh I'm so glad you liked it! I hope you liked this one too! Have a nice day x

candy95 - I'm happy you think so! It was fun to incorporate her into this scene because she always acts so tough and she was genuinely frightened by the monster, but she stepped up in the end to save her friends. Thanks for reviewing!

Court725 - I looooved both of your reviews, thank you so so much! I'm so beyond flattered that you think it's the best Steve fic you've seen, I truly did not think it was anything special when I began to write it, I just kept writing it because I really liked the OC and the relationship she had with Steve. I'm so happy you had a positive reaction to it and I hope you continue to like it as the story progresses. Thank you!

14. Okay, Then

"**WE HAVE TO GO BACK**", Nancy brought up after a few beats of silence, dropping the emptied gun onto the coffee table of the Byers living room. "We should never have left them."

"Go where?" Ringo asked, tilting her head as she lowered her axe and propped it up against the wall.

"The school, Mike and his friends and that girl are there, and-"

"That girl?" She interrupted, her eyes narrowed dramatically. "Is she, perchance, a little preteen with a shaved head? Doesn't talk much?"

"Yeah," Nancy answered confusedly, ignoring the looks of bewilderment Jonathan and Steve were throwing at the two girls for their casual conversation. "How did you know?"

"Oh my god, that little shit," Ringo ranted, rolling her eyes and stomping towards Nancy with a huff. "He brought her into the basement when he found her and we were supposed to tell Karen the next day but then he's like, 'oh Ringo! It's okay! She left already!' And now I find out he was just trying to exclude me!"

"Guys," Jonathan tried to butt in, ignoring the urge to roll his eyes as the two girls, who were stood there practically *gossiping*.

"What?" Nancy questioned with an open mouth, "you guys had a girl in the basement and didn't tell me?!"

"To be fair," Ringo grimaced at the incoming insult, "you're a bit... regal."

"Guys," Jonathan tried again, being completely ignored once more.

"Regal?" Nancy hissed in offence. "How regal is this then? Before you came, we helped Eleven into a kiddie pool in the school and witnessed her contact another *realm*!"

"*What?*" Ringo half-shouted. "You guys were getting freaky in a kiddie pool and didn't invite me? This is why I didn't invite *you* down to the

basement!"

"Well, you ran away! And it wasn't even your name on the board!" Nancy threw her hands up in frustration.

"Guys!" Steve bellowed on Jonathan's behalf, receiving a look of appreciation as a result. Ringo and Nancy had stood toe to toe, their jaws firmly set and staring each other down. But now, they looked towards Steve in perfect sync, and seemingly snapped out of their childish behaviour.

"We have to go, come on Nancy I'll drive you," Jonathan offered, grabbing his keys and heading outside.

"Thanks," Ringo commented sarcastically, watching them bitterly as they stalked towards the car. "I'll just fucking fly then!"

"Come on, I'll give you a ride," Steve interjected, leading her towards his own car. It felt a little strange that Nancy would be riding with Jonathan and Ringo with Steve, and she couldn't help but cast her mind back to the night of the bonfire. A night where Ringo and Steve couldn't stand each other, and Nancy couldn't bring herself to approach Jonathan.

Ringo snapped up her cassette player before she sat down and squished it, furrowing her brows as she looked it over and wondering when it had slipped from her pocket.

Steve waited for a few seconds so Jonathan could pull out of the property first, before following his lead and keeping close behind the entire drive. The car was painfully silent for a few minutes, the shock of the situation was finally starting to settle in and Ringo had to pinch herself to make sure it wasn't a dream.

"Hey, um," she began, turning her head to see the boy driving, "thanks for coming back."

"It's nothing," he shook his head, looking visibly shaken up. His fingers had gripped so tightly onto the steering wheel that his knuckles were white, and his entire posture was stiff.

"It's not nothing," she refuted. "You came back and risked your life for

us, that's not nothing, Steve."

His cheeks, although already swollen from previous hits, seemed to redden even further than they already had. Ringo liked to delude herself into believing her words had that effect on him.

"I just... I couldn't leave you in there," he shrugged, his voice quiet.

"And Nancy too, I'm sure?"

"Yeah," he answered sharply, and she briefly wondered if she had said something wrong. But before she could analyse his tone, he was moving on. "I want to know everything. I want to know what that thing is, where it came from and what you guys were doing. Did you..." Steve looked horrified all of a sudden, "summon a demon?"

"God no, I've seen the Exorcist and I'd sooner go to Hell before I'd let my hair get that frizzed up," she scoffed, but Steve was too tense to laugh. He didn't answer at all, instead waiting patiently for Ringo's explanation.

"Okay, look," she sighed, turning in her seat slightly. "We don't *know* what it is. Nancy seen it behind your house when she went back to look for Barb and they ended up finding it when they went out again at night. That was the first time I had seen it. Nancy had this theory that it appeared from the smell of blood, so we had this bright idea to draw it out and test that. Which, in hindsight, feels like a little stupid."

"And the light bulbs? The 'mom' thing?"

"Yeah, I don't have a clue what that's about. If I had to guess, some shit went down when we were napping."

"It just doesn't make sense," he shook his head gently, his eyebrows furrowed.

Sensing his stress levels were rising once again now that he had time to *think*, Ringo decided a distraction was in order.

"Have you got a marker?" She asked, rifling through the cup holders. Steve pointed to the glovebox, where she retrieved the object

immediately.

"What are you doing?" He pressed, his head turning from the road to look at her in brief glances. Ringo was in the middle of whipping out the tape wedged in the slot of her cassette player. Squinting, he watched as she began to scribble something next to the writing already on the front label.

"What does it say?" He pried, and by some stroke of coincidence, they had to stop at a traffic light at that minute. Steve turned over to nick the tape straight from her hands, but Ringo didn't look the least bit startled.

"Ringo and Steve's Demon Ass Kicking Mix'," he read aloud, uncontrollably smirking at the two words cramped in the open space above the words previously written. He looked back up at her, his smile warm and his eyes bright once more.

"Now it'll be *our* embarrassing playlist," she chuckled at his expression.

"What the hell?" Steve muttered when Jonathan's car led them into the hectic school parking lot, which was amass with police cars and ambulances. Flashing blue and red lights could have been seen from almost a mile away.

He parked his car a little further back from the commotion, to prevent from getting in the way. Steve had no choice but to follow after Ringo when she practically leaped from the car after seeing Karen and Ted's vehicle was also there.

Nancy had clearly noticed as well, looking to Ringo with frantic eyes as she exited from Jonathan's passenger side. When the blonde caught up with her cousin, together they started to sprint towards the area cordoned off for ambulances, their hands clutched together tightly.

Ringo and Nancy looked desperately around for a familiar face, and when Ringo saw Dustin Henderson talking to a paramedic, she couldn't help but rush forward and wrap her arms around him

tightly.

The look on his face was priceless, his eyes widened in amazement as Ringo clutched him to her chest. It took him a second before he wrapped his arms around her in return, beaming brightly against her t-shirt. Nancy rolled her eyes at his expression.

"Dustin, are you okay?" Ringo drew back, huffing and grabbing him by the shoulders when he still held onto her and refused to let go.

"I'm okay, Ringo!" He nodded his head enthusiastically, that stupid grin still present on his face.

"Stop it, you," she whacked his arm impatiently, looking around their surroundings. "Where's Mike?"

Dustin pointed in a direction, and Nancy and Ringo set off again, collectively breathing in relief at the sight of Karen Wheeler, with her arm protectively around Mike as they spoke to a police officer.

"Mom!" Nancy called, shooting towards her and instantly being welcomed into her arms. Karen clutched her daughter tightly, while Ringo crouched slightly to hug her younger cousin.

"We're going to have a long talk, later," she warned into his ear, but her expression fell from relieved to worried when she noticed that he barely heard her words. He seemed to be off in his world, a look on his face as if someone had died. "Mike?"

"Ringo," Karen sounded out, moving to embrace her as well. The blonde was touched by the sentiment, feeling as if she were truly part of their family.

Karen let go of her after a few seconds, eyes welling up in reassurance that they were okay as she stood back and looked between her daughter and niece. But her smile of relief quickly twisted into an expression of frustration as she placed her hands on her hips, going into full 'mom' mode.

"*Where* have you two been?!"

"Mike!" Lucas was shouting as he came into view, distracting Karen

from the oncoming rant she was about to direct at the two girls. The boy came hurtling at full speed towards them, out of breath and panting by the time he spoke. "Did you hear?"

"What?" Mike asked, a newfound energy springing into him.

"They found Will!"

The hospital waiting room almost seemed as if half of Hawkins was there, waiting forever for the news about the young boy that only a few of them had even truly knew well. Of that group, members included Chief Hopper - who's presence made Steve rather uncomfortable, Ted and Karen Wheeler, Nancy, Jonathan, Lucas, Dustin, Mike and Ringo.

The room was silent, each of the attendants feeling nail-bitingly anxious but completely shocked by the turn of events. Hopper, Nancy, Jonathan and the kids already knew about the possibility of Will being alive, but the rest of them had been completely out of the loop. Ringo couldn't wrap her head around the fact she had attended Will's funeral, when there apparently wasn't even a body to bury.

Through the silence, Dustin and Lucas' quiet bickering cut through the tension, to either the amusement or the frustration of the others. Ringo, who had been seated between Ted and Steve - rather awkwardly, furrowed her brows when she thought she heard the mention of her name.

"I'm telling you man, it happened," Dustin was arguing, his hands in the air innocently.

"There is *no* way a junior would come any where near you, never mind let you touch her boobs!" Lucas fired back.

"Will you listen to me? She didn't let me touch them she squished my face against them!" Dustin giddied excitedly, prompting Ringo to roll her eyes and call him out.

"What are you saying, you little perv?" She threatened, raising an eyebrow and crossing her arms over her chest.

"Nothing!" He replied in a shrill voice.

"So," Ted suddenly leaned forward to see both Ringo and Steve, his eyes full of suspicion but his voice as dry as could be. Steve shuffled under his pointed glare. "Are you two dating?"

"What?!" Ringo sputtered, her eyes widened as she shook her head violently in denial.

"No!" Steve answered, his voice a few octaves higher than even Dustin's had been.

"Well, first you bring him to the house and now you're sitting together and he's giving you rides everywhere," Ted explained his thinking, causing the two teenagers faces to burn red.

"No! It's not like that! Steve is Nancy's-" a fiery gaze from her cousin cut off Ringo's words, leaving her stammering and nervous as everyone in the room had now fixed their attention on the spectacle.

"He's Nancy's what?"

"Um..." she mumbled, eyes darting around the room for help. "Her... I mean *my* friend. He's my friend. Just a friend. We do a lot of friend stuff together like... hanging out and getting rides... and stuff."

Steve mentally face palmed, pushing back against the seat as if that would hide him. Thankfully, a nurse entered the waiting room, and the focus of everyone's attention was now on her instead.

"He's awake," she smiled warmly, leaving Mike, Lucas, Dustin, Jonathan and Nancy to spring up from their chairs and pile out into the hallway, rushing towards his designated room.

Ringo allowed herself a smile at the sight, feeling nothing but happiness for Will's friends and family, whether there was an explanation for his reappearance or not. She was sure Nancy would relay all to her later.

"He'll never leave Will today," Karen sighed, checking her watch and cringing at the time - 6.30am.

"I'm so tired," Ringo murmured, leaning her head back against the wall and shutting her eyes to emphasise her point.

"I can drive Ringo home if you're planning on staying, Mrs Wheeler," Steve piped up, his voice a little less sure than usual - probably because of their embarrassment from moments ago.

"Is that okay with you, Ringo?" She raised her brows, she herself wondering about the relationship between the two. The last she checked, Steve and Nancy were the ones sneaking behind her back, not Steve and Ringo.

"Yes, that'd be great," she breathed in relief, standing up along with him and following after he went to leave. Even when they were out of sight, Ted still kept his narrowed eyes on the door.

"He better not get her pregnant," he commented, pushing Karen to roll her eyes.

"Thanks Steve, you're a lifesaver," Ringo practically moaned when he pulled into the Wheeler driveway. She was ready to have a bubble bath and scrub the dirty feeling of that monster off of her skin and then climb into bed for a semi-coma.

Steve switched the engine off, and the car was suddenly silent, leaving a palpable tension in its wake, which Ringo decided to break.

"So, last night was crazy huh?"

"Well it's not every day you get to say that you've become your girlfriend's cousin's chauffeur, went to the house of the guy who may or may not have slept with said girlfriend, fought off an otherworldly demon and witnessed a boy seemingly come back from the dead."

Ringo was silent for a few moments as she took it all in, letting out a huff of laughter after.

"Girlfriend?" She questioned after her giggles died down, quoting his words.

"Yeah," he replied, his tone dropping the sarcasm and suddenly

turning serious, "I mean... if she'll forgive me."

"Oh," Ringo said dumbly, her face scrunched in thought. "Um... cool."

"Is that.. a problem?" He pressed, looking at her side profile. Ringo turned to look at him, plastering a small smile on her lips to mask her disapproval.

"Why would it be?"

"Okay then," he nodded, looking at her suspiciously. But her words rang true, why would she have a problem?

"Okay then."

We're basically at the end of the season, but I don't want to just do a time jump straight to Christmas and you'll see why when that happens. I want to write another chapter squeezing in some interaction between them all before then, to show how Ringo reacts to Steve and Nancy, how Jonathan reacts and more importantly, how different Steve and Nancy act around each other now.

I hope no one is too upset about Steve hoping to patch things up with Nancy, remember that this is a bit of a slow burn (but not too slow!) I have plenty of time to develop their relationship properly and I fully intend to, any feelings between them now are new and confusing to them.

Thanks everyone who read or reviewed the previous chapter!

PsychoBeachGirl88 - Steve wants to work things out with Nancy right now because he's still so attached to her, but not to worry, because in the show it was very much Steve chasing Nancy when she wanted Jonathan but now both of them want someone else so they'll be different to the canon while he struggles with any budding feelings for Ringo! Thanks so much for your support! xx

harleyquinn87 - Ahhh just what I love to hear! I hope you liked this one too and whats to come! x

PondLake - Imagine Steve in the Avengers though, it would just be a

*whole bunch of "WOAH WOAH WOAH, ALIENS?! WOAH WOAH
HANG ON STOOOOOP!"*

*candy95 - I feel sorry for her too! Which is why I want to delay
Ringo and Steve getting together because I adore healthy female
relationships in books and I don't think Ringo would just readily
betray her like that, thanks so much and I hope you liked this
chapter! x*

*Court725 - Ahhh thanks so much! Hearing stuff like that really
encourages me to write more 3*

*62MoonParade - and I love YOU for loving this story! Thanks so
much and I hope you continue to like it! x*

15. Birthmark

"YOU'RE STARING," Jessica drily commented, barely glancing up from her book to acknowledge her blonde friend seated next to her. Ringo snapped out of her daze, the drone of the cafeteria filling her ears once again. She hadn't realised it, but she *had* been staring at the table Steve and Nancy were seated at, for God knows how long.

"I'm not," she lied dismissively, absently picking up a carrot from her packed lunch and crunching on it angrily. The texture of the vegetable making it perfect to bite harshly into, and hopefully release some of her frustration.

"Oh okay," Jessica settled her copy of Sylvia Plath's 'The Bell Jar' down onto the table to look her friend in the eye. "So I suppose you were really eyeing up Nancy's apple and thinking 'damn, I want a bite of that', instead of Steve Harrington?"

"W-What?" Ringo sputtered in shock, her face reddening instantly as her head snapped up to look at Jessica. "It's not like that, honestly it's not!"

"What is it like then?" She pressed, a smirk playing with her lips. "Last I checked, we hated him. And now you're gazing off lovingly into the distance like he's the Sandy to your Danny."

"Well don't worry," she huffed, leaning back into her seat and crossing her arms. "I won't be sitting on the table singing about him or his greasy hair any time soon."

"Good," Jessica nodded, "I've heard you sing, it ain't pretty."

"Hey!" She protested.

"Why don't you tell me what's going on?" Ringo sighed at her words, mulling over her thoughts. Ultimately, Jessica and Nancy were her best friends. But seeing as the theme of what was on in her mind directly involved Nancy, perhaps it was best to tell the friend that was an outsider in this situation.

"Okay, so," she turned to Jessica, who giddied eagerly at the prospect of being told. "Steve and Nancy kinda split up after that whole cinema incident-

"Good, power to her."

"Can I finish?" Ringo groaned, continuing when she nodded. "Anyways, they got back together afterward. And I just... can't figure out why? Like, they don't work. At all. Opposites attract and all that, but all they do is fight and their relationship is purely based off of lust and not actual love for each other."

"Do you realise how jealous you sound?" Jessica cocked an eyebrow at her.

"I'm not jealous, it's not like that. They're both close to me, I love them both and I want them to be happy. I can disapprove of their relationship without having to like Steve," Ringo disputed, but Jessica only smirked silently in response, like she knew something the blonde didn't.

"And she so *obviously* likes Jonathan. I'm her cousin, I want her to be happy!"

"Shut up," Jessica answered, which Ringo took as a reaction of shock.

"No, really! You should see the way she looks at him."

"No, *shut up!*" She hissed again, and the following scraping of a chair told Ringo that it was actually a warning. Surprised, she turned and let out a small sigh of relief upon seeing that Jonathan was joining her.

"Hey, um," he began, taking her flabbergasted expression as a negative thing. "Mind if I sit?"

"Of course not!" She beamed in encouragement, gesturing towards the chair and nodding a little too over-eagerly. Jonathan smiled slightly, placing his tray of food down and joining the girls.

"I've never seen you in the cafeteria before, Byers," Jessica said randomly, receiving a look from Ringo in return.

"Oh, I usually eat in my car."

His revelation almost broke her heart, but Ringo tried to keep her smile alive. It had been two weeks since the events at Halloween, and the group had only just gotten over their original trauma. Funnily enough, it had brought the four together in the most weird, but surprisingly effective combination.

"Well you can eat with us any time," Ringo told him, "the 'Feminazi' and the 'Slut', as the rest of the school so affectionally calls us."

Jonathan let out a small chuckle at his words, and she found that his growing confidence was a pleasant surprise. The old Jonathan would never have approached the girls in the first place, no matter how close they were.

"The Weirdo, the Feminazi and the Slut," Jonathan mused, "sounds like one hell of a TV show."

As they continued to eat and chatter on about their day, Ringo couldn't help but let her eyes drift back to that table. Even Steve and Nancy themselves seemed different around each other, barely speaking as Nancy read a book and Steve picked at his food. It was a far cry from how they acted weeks before, where Steve couldn't keep his hands off of her.

She tried to keep her focus fixed on her own group and their conversation, but that focus only allowed her to see that Jonathan was doing the exact same thing - pretending he wasn't looking when he was.

Ringo had never felt as relaxed in her life. Laying sprawled out on her cot, a green skin mask on her face and the *Rumours* vinyl Steve had procured for her playing in the background.

A knock on the door brought her out of her stupor with a groan. Rolling her eyes beneath her closed eyelids, she sat up on the bed and took the cucumber slices from her eyes, slipping them into her mouth and eating them.

"Come in!" She called, her voice muffled slightly from the food inside her mouth. Hesitantly, the door opened, revealing, to her surprise, a nervous-looking Mike Wheeler on the other side.

"Mike..." she murmured, reaching over and switching the record player off completely, suddenly looking alert. "What's up?"

"Um, mom and dad took Holly to the park and Nancy is gone, so I was wondering are you making dinner, or..?" He asked, his voice low. His entire demeanour had become a similar sight for her the last few weeks, and she hated that her cousin had went from a happy-go-lucky innocent kid, to a boy who had seen such horrors and lost his new friend for it.

"Well... I can't cook, so we can go out for food if you want?" She offered, tilting her head politely. Mike nodded, turning to the door to head out. Ringo followed, grabbing her purse.

"You might wanna wash that off first," Mike called over his shoulder to her confusion, before she remembered the hardening green substance coating her pores. "I thought for a second the Demigorgan had come back to finish us off."

"So, I guess Eleven never left that morning huh?" Ringo grimaced as she brought up the subject, knowing it was a tender one for Mike, but she had been avoiding it for too long.

"Yeah, sorry that I lied to you," he muttered, pushing the dollop of ketchup on the side of his plate around with a French fry.

"I'm not mad that you did, I just want to know.. why? I thought we were close, Mike," she murmured, finding herself mimicking him by awkwardly pushing her food around.

"We are! But you would have told someone about her, and you seen the kind of people she was hiding from with your own eyes."

"Yeah," she huffed, raising her eyebrows. "I'm sorry that you felt like you couldn't trust me."

Mike didn't respond, but did give her a small smile, which was

enough for Ringo.

"By the way," she leaned in, dropping her fry and lowering her voice. "If you ever happen to find another government-experiment runaway, let me know. I won't tell anyone."

"I don't think I'll meet anyone like El again," he replied sadly, and Ringo got the sense that he wasn't just talking about someone with her abilities and background.

"It'll get easier, I promise." When she saw her words were of little comfort to him, she decided a distraction was in order. "Hey, hurry up and eat and I'll take you to the arcade before we go home."

His eyes lit up at this, knowing full well that his friends would already be there. They had invited him, but Mike wasn't feeling up to going, then.

With a newfound energy, he started to shovel the food into his mouth, causing her to laugh at his puffed out cheeks.

"I'm just going to the bathroom, okay?" She slipped out of their booth, making her way through the small diner towards the ladies room.

After doing her business, she looked into the mirror, fluffed her hair and adjusted her clothes. Ringo turned towards the door, preparing to leave but the sound of a quiet sob stopped her.

She followed the sound towards an occupied cubicle in the bathroom, it was clear the person was trying to be quiet, but she could still hear their muffled crying as she came closer.

"Hey," she spoke out awkwardly, rapping her knuckles gently against the door, "are you okay?"

"I'm fine," the feminine voice grunted back, thick with emotion, "just leave me alone."

"Look," she began, leaning against the frame beside the door. "I don't know what's going on, or who this is, but I'm not leaving until I know you're okay. So, we can either talk it out, hug this shit out, or make

toilet paper Voodoo dolls and stab them with the dispensary tampons."

The person on the other side chuckled at this, quiet sniffles being the only sounds that followed until they reached forward and unlocked the latch on the door, opening it to reveal themselves. Ringo let out a quiet gasp when she saw that it was the very woman she had fought weeks before - Carol.

Carol didn't look at all surprised to see her, probably knowing full well that it was her on the other side by her voice. Pushing aside their history, Ringo stepped inside and shut the door after her, leaning back against it and looking Carol over. The redhead was seated on the closed toilet lid, her face as red as her hair and soaked with tears.

"Are you happy now? I'm sure this is exactly what you wanted, to see me all pathetic and crying in the bathroom of a fucking diner," her voice croaked out, her hands flying up to rub at her cheeks.

"Why would I want that?" Ringo slid down the door until she was sitting on the ground, wrapping her arms around her bent knees.

"Gee, I didn't exactly get the impression you liked me when you threw Coke all over me," she drawled sarcastically, reaching for a tissue.

"And I didn't exactly get the impression you liked me when you've been a bitch since the day we met," Ringo fired back. Carol fixed a glare on her, which eventually melted back into her broken expression. She felt out of place seeing the girl like this, of all the people in Hawkins, Ringo wouldn't have been more shocked to see anyone else crying in the bathroom.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I don't mean to be like that, I just... it's easier to take things out on others when it's always others taking things out on you."

"What do you mean?" Ringo asked, her voice noticeably softer.

"Tommy," Carol shook her head, squeezing her eyes shut at the

mention of his name. "I've loved him since the third grade, and he *knows* that. But still, he'll kiss other girls in front of me to humiliate me."

"Maybe he's trying to get a reaction?"

"Or maybe he doesn't just care about me," she shrugged. In this situation, Nancy would have reassured her, told her that Tommy really *did* care and that she was just being silly. But that was Nancy, and Ringo would never be dishonest to make someone feel better.

"Listen, if he does things that hurts your feelings on purpose, then maybe he doesn't care about those feelings. And that's got nothing to do with you, he's the douchebag who led you on and encouraged those feelings," she explained.

"It's my own fault, I should have stayed away from him the second I saw him talking to Ashford after what he did to you," Carol revealed, much to Ringo's surprise.

"Why?" She dared to question.

"Because what Daniel did was wrong," Carol rolled her eyes. "Say what you want about the stuff I said about Nancy, but that was really messed up. You didn't deserve that."

Ringo looked down at her feet, the memory flooding back to her accompanied a wave of shame and sadness.

"Why are you being so nice now?" The blonde asked suspiciously. Carol chuckled falsely.

"Haven't you noticed? Tommy isn't around. I only act like that around him so he'll like me. But clearly that doesn't work, so maybe I need to start thinking about myself for once."

"That's not a half bad idea," Ringo smirked. "Sorry I threw Coke all over you."

"Well, I'm sorry that I called you a Steve Nicks wannabe who hangs off Steve's dick like a birthmark."

"You never called me that," Ringo replied, eyes widened.

"Oh," she grimaced apologetically, "I did."

Ringo couldn't help but laugh and shove her leg playfully. Perhaps the two had gotten each other wrong the entire time.

"Oh, Ringo!" Karen called the second she and Mike walked back inside the house, hours later. "You're back!"

"Yeah, sorry for being late but we had to walk," Ringo cast a glance towards the living room, her breath hitching at the sight of Nancy and Steve there, cuddling into each other on the couch. The feeling stirred in her at the image of them was instead replaced with confusion as to why she felt affected at all.

Sensing someone staring, they looked up from the tv to meet her eyes, smiling and waving at her kindly.

"Hey, Ringo!" Steve greeted her enthusiastically, causing Nancy to stiffen slightly and her smile to turn sour.

"Hey, guys," she nodded her head once, turning around and swiftly walking away from them, shutting the living room door behind her. Steve's eyebrows furrowed at his friends strange behaviour, normally, she would have joined them. Or at least make a joke at their expense.

On the other side of the door, Ringo was leaning against it, staring off into the distance as she tried to push away the swell of emotion building in her.

"Your mother has been calling, Ringo," Karen rounded the corner and told her before Ringo could escape upstairs.

"Oh," she responded, not at all eager at the prospect. Sighing quietly, she leaned off of the door and went towards the kitchen to retrieve the phone. Her mother's number had seemingly been scrawled on a sticky note next to the telephone.

The receiver picked up after a few seconds of rings, just when Ringo was about to give in and hang up.

"Hello?" Her mother greeted, voice light. The very sound of it made her chest clench, how could she not have missed her mother?"

"Hey, mom."

The shared bedroom had been deathly silent since Ringo and Nancy had settled into their beds respectively, where normally - they would have talked into the wee hours of the morning until they were tired.

But it was clear the atmosphere between the two cousins had changed, and Ringo couldn't for the life of her figure out why.

"Hey, Ringo?" Nancy's quiet voice was such a surprise to her that she almost jumped in her sheets, turning head towards the source although she couldn't see through the dark.

"Yeah?" She answered tentatively.

"If I ask you something, will you tell me the truth?"

"Nancy, you know I never lie," she encouraged her, suddenly nervous by the upcoming question.

"Yeah," Nancy responded, the sounds of her shuffling around in bed following immediately thereafter. "Did something happen between you and Steve?"

"No."

"Do you... *want* something to happen?"

Silence.

"No."

"Okay, goodnight."

"Goodnight."

And just as simple as that, Ringo had lied to Nancy, something she'd never thought she'd have to do.

Ringo had an inner debate with herself about whether or not to tell Nancy that her mother was coming to take her back home to Florida, but ultimately, stayed quiet. To her further surprise, Nancy was the last person she wanted to talk to right now.

I'm not too proud of this chapter, if I'm honest. Writing wise, I mean. But I wanted to include this little filler chapter to develop Ringo's character and focus on her relationships with the other characters, instead of just her and Steve, which was why there wasn't any Stingo moments. But the next chapter will be the last one of 1983, so that will be jam packed! And then we'll move on to 1984!

I also included a little character development for Carol, mainly because I'm a sucker for girl power in books and wanted to redeem her character a little because I don't truly think everyone acts the way they do without a reason.

There was a little bombshell there at the end, I hope everyone trusts me with this one!

harleyquinn87 - I will change the canon story eventually, it's only following along with it right now because it's a part of my master plan! Thanks so much and I hope you liked this one too!

kate langdon - Nonsense! I read your story and like I told you, it sounds great so far and you're an amazing writer! It's a lot better than mine that's for sure! Thank you so so much x

Court725 - I hope it lived up to your expectation! There's another chapter to come before we wrap up and do a time jump forward, which I think you might like! (or hope anyway haha) Thanks so much for reviewing, have a great day! 3

candy95 - I'm so glad to hear that you're alright with them staying together and understand why I did it! I intend on changing some aspects of the next season, Steve and Nancy will be one of them! Thanks so much! x

16. Don't Stop Believing

"HEY, SORRY I'M LATE," Steve greeted her in a hurried tone, making his way towards the booth she was sat in after practically bursting through the door of Brainshakes, catching the attention of the rest of the customers.

"It's fine," she replied, her tight-lipped smile indicated to Steve that it was, in fact, not fine.

"I'm sorry, honestly! I had to give Nancy a ride home and I lost track of time," he explained, running a hand through his frazzled hair. His state of disarray, as well as his reddened lips and messy hair, told her that he was *with* Nancy, but perhaps not explicitly driving her anywhere.

"I don't care, Steve," she deadpanned, looking at him with a bored expression. Inside, she was rather offended that he was twenty minutes late to meet her. Knowing that he had spent that time with Nancy hurt her even more.

"Are you okay?" He pressed, looking at her with furrowed brows and a concerned expression.

"Peachy," she answered, taking a sip of her milkshake through the straw, waiting until she was done to speak again. "And you?"

"I'm doing great. I'm sorry again, really. I don't know what's gotten into Nancy lately, I told her I had to meet you at five and she suddenly couldn't bear to let me go," Steve complained, his cheeks flushed. Ringo raised an eyebrow uninterestedly, of all the things in the world she wanted to talk to Steve about, his relationship with her cousin was at the farthest bottom.

"I'm moving back to Florida," she cut off his rambling, causing his gaze to snap forward to hers and his expression to crumple into one of surprise.

"What?" He hissed, shock filling him as Ringo smiled sheepishly.

"My mom called me. Her and my dad are getting a divorce, and she... she apologised for not taking my side after the whole photograph thing. It was mainly my dad who blamed me, anyways."

"Well..." he murmured, lost for words as his eyes downcast to the table. "I mean, that's great. I'm glad she came to her senses, because it *wasn't* your fault. How do you feel about them getting a divorce?"

"I'm honestly okay with it," she hummed, "they fight a lot. I'm kind of glad. She got a job as an assistant in some company so now she has a little more money, no more trailer park life for me," she smiled weakly, fiddling with the straw of her milkshake.

"When are you leaving? The end of the school year?" He asked, dreading he answer. Somehow, six months of Ringo Wheeler didn't seem like it would ever be enough. He felt a sudden rush of guilt for how their friendship had drifted slightly since Halloween, Steve had poured all his time into school and his relationship with Nancy, he didn't realise he was neglecting the person who had surely become his most trusted best friend.

"Sunday," she admitted quietly. Steve felt as if his heart had dropped in his chest. Today was only *Wednesday*.

"B-but that's so soon! You can't leave now, it's the middle of the school year! Christmas is in two weeks!" He stammered, almost pleadingly.

"She wants me to spend Christmas with her in her new apartment, and I think it will be good for me to get away from this place for a bit. I haven't been feeling all that sunshiney lately." Her words made him frown again, leaning in to rest his elbows on the table. He reached out and placed his hand on hers, but the action had caused her to stiffen and instantly shuffle out of his grip, further confusing him.

"Ringo? What's going on? You can talk to me."

"Nothing I've just.." she looked back into his eyes, his saddened expression broke her heart a little. In truth, Ringo's mother probably would have waited until after Christmas to take her back to Florida.

But she didn't want to spend another minute debating with herself over why the sight of Steve with his arm around Nancy filled her with rage. "I haven't been sleeping lately. I've been having nightmares about Halloween."

It wasn't technically a lie, Ringo had been plagued with dreams of the monster for almost two months now. Every time she closed her eyes, she was back in the Byers living room facing down the demon. Except unlike before, she wasn't equipped with an axe or surrounded by her cousin and friends. She was left completely defenceless and alone, with nothing to stop the monster from flying towards her.

"Why didn't you say something?" He asked, grimacing with guilt once more that he hadn't been there for her.

"You've been busy," she blurted out before she could stop herself, watching as he appeared taken aback by her confession.

"I know," he sighed, looking down and shaking his head. "Look, I have a free house this weekend, why don't we throw you a going away party? No relationship business all week, just me and you. The ass kicker squad."

"You think alcohol and a party is going to make me feel better?" She scoffed, causing his smile to dim until she spoke again. "Because you'd be dead right."

"Karen," Ted piped up, chewing on his food before continuing. "Why is half of Hawkins at our dinner table?"

On cue, Jessica and the entirety of Mike's friend group looked up with pursed lips, each huddled around the table and sitting on every free chair that they could find around the house, pulled up to the table.

"Come on, Ted," Karen muttered, narrowing her eyes at his rudeness as she fed her youngest daughter another spoonful of dinner. "They want to say goodbye to Ringo, it's her last night in case you've forgotten."

"Well, then you all better eat all of that dinner, we don't give out free food in this house, it isn't a soup kitchen."

Ringo and Jessica met eyes, both looking away abruptly after before they would burst into laughter at his words.

"I just can't believe it," Dustin murmured sadly, pushing his food around. "I can't believe she's leaving me."

"I'm not dying, Dustin," Ringo huffed, taking a sip of water.

"You may as well be! I'll never see you-"

"*We'll* never see you," Lucas interrupted, glaring harshly at Dustin.

"Can you guys back off?" Mike called across the table to the two of them. "Like, hello! That's my cousin!"

"Oh, so cousins are off-limits?" Dustin fired back. "So we can move onto Nancy now when Ringo leaves?"

"Hey!" Nancy protested.

"Don't be ridiculous, I'm irreplaceable," Ringo flipped her hair over her shoulder, wearing a triumphant smirk as Jessica sat watching the spectacle in amusement.

"Please, as if you'd want Nancy," Mike rolled his eyes.

"Mike," Karen warned.

"As if you know anything about girls Mike," Nancy interjected. "Unless there was one in Dungeons and Dragons."

"Funnily enough, there were a few creatures in that game that looked like you."

Nancy rolled her eyes at his insult, prompting Ringo to stifle her laughter behind her hand.

"I'm really gonna miss you guys," she mentioned suddenly, her tone turning from amused to reminiscent.

"Aw!" Dustin shot up from his chair rounding the table and coming behind Ringo to hug her tightly. Ringo held her hands up in defence, but the other boys - Will, Mike and Lucas, only followed him. Soon enough, Ringo was being enveloped in a group hug, not sure whether to laugh or cry. It had only been a few months since she first arrived, but the attachment she had formed was astounding. She had truly found a home here, but she should have known it would only be temporary. This was originally intended to be a form of punishment, after all.

Ringo and Nancy got ready for the party together. The 'together' part meaning strictly in physical terms, of course. The duo barely spoke to one another any more, and as they shared the mirror to apply their make up, the full realisation that she was leaving hit Ringo with full force. This was the last time she and Nancy would scramble about with make up to get ready.

Ringo and Nancy Wheeler never allowed boys to get between them when they were little. While the boys on the playground were attracted to Ringo's confidence instead of Nancy's shy nature, Ringo had always pushed them aside in favour of playing with Nancy. And eventually when playground trips turned into shopping, going to the movies and going out, the attraction to both girls became fairly equal. But still, there were occasions when a guy who had caught their eye would lust after the other of the two. None the less, they had never let jealousy reach the point of affecting their relationship. Until now, and Ringo hated it.

Nancy knew. Of course she did, women always sensed these things. She knew that there was a part of Ringo, however small it was, that lusted after *her* boyfriend. And as much as she hated to admit it, a part of her resented her cousin for that. From the beginning, even when they hated each other, she saw a chemistry between them that made her jaw clench. Gradually, as Ringo and Steve grew closer while her own relationship deteriorated, Nancy found herself blaming Ringo for their problems. But of course, the only people to blame for Steve and Nancy's problems - was Steve and Nancy.

"Look," Ringo began quietly, snapping her tube of lipstick closed and turning to face the brunette, almost shyly. "I know we've kind of

drifted lately, but I just... I'm going to miss you. I'm gonna miss our late night talks and our harmless bickering, I'm even gonna miss sharing a room with you. I just wanted you to know that, whatever the reason is that you're not comfortable around me, I miss you. And I will miss you."

"Ringo," Nancy sighed, pushing aside their differences and stepping forward to wrap her arms around the blonde. "I'm sorry I've been distant, I just... do you remember we went to that sleepover that turned into a party when I was thirteen?"

Ringo nodded, unsure of where she was going with this.

"Well, do you remember that really cute guy? Alex, I think his name was. I had a crush on him for months at school. And then... then you showed up from Florida, pretty and perfect, and he instantly set his sights on you."

"You liked him?" Ringo gasped, her face turning into a grimace as guilt filled her.

"Yeah," she admitted. "And then we played spin the bottle, and it landed on you, and then he spent the rest of the night with his arm around you and telling you he'd miss you when you left?"

"Nancy, I would never-"

"I didn't tell you that I liked him because it was a crush at that time, and I knew that however much I liked him, I liked having my best friend around much more."

Ringo looked down at her feet as Nancy finished, swallowing harshly as she tried to contain her emotions.

"But.. I can't do that with Steve, Ringo," she murmured quietly.

"I would never ask you to," Ringo promised, gripping Nancy's shoulders and facing her head on.

"I don't just have a schoolgirl crush on Steve. I *really* like him. And I know you do too - don't try to deny it. But I can't give him up, and I don't want that to affect us."

"Nancy," Ringo began, her cheeks flushed red in embarrassment. "Whatever... *feelings* I have, they're nowhere near strong enough for me to want to split you two up or hurt your feelings. And honestly, Steve likes you, he's told me himself and I can see it with my own eyes. I would never chase someone who wanted someone else, especially if that someone else was my cousin and my best friend."

Nancy looked touched by her words, suddenly emotional herself as she wrapped her arms around the blonde. The realisation that they'd never see each other as regularly as they did now again hit her like a train.

"And besides," Ringo pulled away, wiping underneath her eyes to prevent smudging her make up. "Noah was a shit kisser, I done you a favour."

Once upon a time, Steve Harrington had been hailed the King of parties, and it was a name he lived up to.

There wasn't often a party in Hawkins where he wasn't found doing keg stands and destroying his liver bit by bit. Except tonight, where for the first time since his birthday party at KFC when he was seven, he was the host of a party and didn't get blind drunk.

On the contrary, he was stone cold sober. Standing off to the side and watching the party rage on, he realised it certainly looked different from the other side when you weren't joining in. He was often tempted to have one or two, just to take the edge off, but his eyes would then catch on to the blonde dancing in the centre of the room and he'd catch himself.

Since hearing her news that evening in a booth in Brainshakes, Steve's world - which he thought was finally steady and had direction, completely flipped. He couldn't lie to himself in saying that everything was sugar sweet, there was a noticeable difference in his relationship with Nancy that wasn't there before. But Steve had put that down to the loss of a spark that every couple went through eventually, despite only having been dating Nancy for nigh on four months. He had hoped that it was just a rough patch from their trauma, and that it would even out again eventually.

He couldn't lie either that because of that wedge between him and Nancy, he had been making up for the distance by straying further from Ringo. His neutral expression faltered for a second at the thought of her, the guilt surging through him again when he remembered how he would choose to sit with Nancy at lunch instead of her. How he would find a new song or hear about a new movie, instantly want to show Ringo, show Nancy instead and pretend like her false enthusiasm didn't hurt him slightly.

Steve believed opposites attract, but sometimes he wondered if himself and Nancy were evidence of that. After all, Ringo was more his counterpart than her cousin. Where he was upper middle-class, she hailed from a poorer background. Where she strayed away from the spotlight, he thrived in it, and he sensed Nancy liked having him on his arm walking through the hallways as well. While she didn't care what others thought, he depended on it. But as different as they were, Ringo *got* Steve in a way that nobody else had. He couldn't remember the last time he had told someone when something was making him sad, until Ringo.

But of course, in the time it had taken him to come to this realisation, she would be leaving.

He smirked in amusement when she tripped slightly over her own feet, eyes wide as she scrambled to prevent her drink from spilling over the top of the cup and beaming brightly at her friend Jessica when she was successful.

Feeling eyes on her, Ringo turned around, eyes slightly hazed from the drinks she had consumed so far. When she met Steve's gaze, her cheeks lifted into a grin so wide and contagious, he couldn't help but smile back, despite his sour mood. Eventually, she went back to dancing, but Steve had kept his eyes on her.

He had wanted to stay sober tonight for their inevitable goodbye, and so he could be the one to drive her home for one last time. And Nancy too, of course.

"Alright, alright!" Jessica had called out suddenly, lifting her bottle of Coke into the air and stepping back to angle it towards Ringo. "This beautiful bitch right here is leaving my side, so before I'm left to rot

with the rest of you, I just wanted to say... I'll miss you."

Ringo's cheeriness fell at her friends words, the reminder of her impending departure ate her up. Instantly, she set her red cup down and shot forward, wrapping her arms around Jessica tightly.

Jessica's announcement had triggered a chain reaction, and soon everyone was coming forward to give Ringo a hug, one-by-one. He stiffened slightly at the sight of Jonathan Byers wrapping an arm around her, for what reason - he wasn't aware. Perhaps he would never fully get over the photograph incident and finding him in bed with Nancy, and wished Ringo didn't so easily.

Feeling like a stranger in his own home, Steve let out the smallest of sighs and moved out the back to sit on a deck chair next to the pool. All of the inhabitants had stayed inside of the house, the bitter December air holding them in, so Steve was left entirely alone.

He looked out over the water, thinking of Barb, at that moment. Wondering how she had felt in her last minutes. There was no denying the back yard held an eerie feeling since her disappearance, and it often made him uncomfortable.

Steve wasn't sure how long he had spent gazing in silence, but the sound of the back door sliding open caused him to jump slightly. He turned to look over his shoulder, lips lifting in a forced smile at the sight of Ringo coming out to him.

"It's freezing out here," she complained, shuffling forward and nestling in to sit next Steve at the bottom of the lounge chair. "Why are you outside?"

"Just needed some air," he answered vaguely, ignoring how she leaned against his arm for warmth.

"Thanks for throwing me this party," she spoke gratefully, resting her cheek against his shoulder blade. Steve tried not to flinch at the action, pushing aside the invisible boundary between them to wrap his arm around her shoulders and hold her to him, keeping her nestled into his side and warm.

"I'm really going to miss you, Rin'," he sighed wistfully, resting his cheek against the top of her head.

"I'll miss you too," she whispered, "you big bird looking son of a bitch."

His laughter was instantaneous, reverberating through his body and shaking her slightly from their proximity.

"I got you something," he began suddenly, reaching into his jacket pocket with his free hand and nestling through it until he uncovered the rectangular object.

He unveiled it to her, watching with satisfaction as her expression softened, lifting her hands out and taking the cassette box.

One day, around a week after the Halloween incident, Steve had come to the Wheelers for dinner so Nancy could introduce him properly and appropriately as her boyfriend. His visit had turned into a rather eventful game night with the whole family. Since she had received the fright of her life at Halloween with the fear of losing Mike, Karen had taken to documenting any and all happy moments the family shared with her camera.

She happened to snap one of Steve and Ringo after they had successfully teamed up and beat Mike and Nancy, and Ted and Karen in a game of charades. Admittedly, the picture had looked rather couple-y, with Steve's arm around her as he looked down at her beaming face with a soft expression.

After hearing about her impending leave, he had asked Karen for a copy of the picture which was now stuffed inside the cassette tape box as a sort of cover image.

Ringo beamed at the sight of it, carefully opening the box to reveal a cassette tape inside. On the label of the tape was the words, scrawled in his messy handwriting, 'Ringo's Sunshine and Rainbows Mix.'

Immediately she barked a laugh, wondering how Steve had remembered one of their earliest conversations in Nancy's bedroom where she had claimed that her twelve year old self would never

have a tape named such a thing.

"That's amazing," she chuckled, turning to see Steve's cheeks had flushed.

"I figured you might get bored of the same songs over and over again, so I thought you might want some new ones. For the drive to Florida," he explained with a slight stammer to his words, which she found entirely endearing.

Ringo's heart soared in her chest at his words. Completely unable to help herself, she leaned in and pressed a kiss to his reddened cheek, before wrapping her arms around his middle and squeezing him tightly from the side.

Steve hesitated for a moment, completely shocked by her action, before finally wrapping his arms around her in return.

When they pulled out of their embrace, there was a moment where their eyes locked and the air between them had completely stilled. The only sound Ringo could hear was her blood rushing through her ears, and she decided at that second that she had wanted nothing more than to kiss him again, except further to the left this time.

Steve was struggling himself with holding back, his eyes routinely flicking down between her eyes and lips which seemed so perfectly plump that night, as if to tempt him.

The moment felt as if it had lasted forever, but was probably just a few seconds in reality. They had both snapped back to normality simultaneously, eyes blinking rapidly and looking anywhere but at each other. Awkwardness had crept up on the pair, and neither knew what to say, guilt overcoming both of them for even thinking of doing such a thing.

"Ringo!" Nancy's voice sounded after the scrape of the door, "Mom's here to pick us up!"

Ringo's eyes flitted back to meet Steve's, standing up as slow as she possibly could. Perhaps this wouldn't be this last time she would see Steve Harrington, but it was surely the last she would see him for

quite a while.

"I'll see you around, Harrington," she forced a smile, as she walked backwards to follow after Nancy.

"Bye Ringo..."

And just like that, she disappeared around the door, hopefully taking his racing heartbeat and dry mouth with him.

Ringo had hugged her cousins and aunt so many times since morning broke, her arms had ached slightly. Karen had woken her up with blueberry pancakes in bed, and Nancy had given her a bracelet with her name on it, identical to the one she always wore, as a sort of farewell present. Mike had handed her some comics he spotted her trying to steal a few weeks ago, to read in the car.

The morning had been rather emotional, even Ted seemed to be the slightest bit affected by the blonde's departure. They had enjoyed a quiet morning in the living room, reminiscing over the memories Ringo had made since arriving and thanking them profusely for being so kind to her.

Mike's friends had called around for a short while to give her a farewell hug, before being shooed away by Karen. Eventually, noon had come around, and the doorbell had rung.

"Ringo, sweetie," her mother walked inside the threshold after the door opened for her, reaching for her daughter and enveloping her in a hug. "You look amazing! Even healthier!"

"Yeah," Ringo agreed awkwardly, slightly put off by the sudden welcoming nature her mom was giving off. The last time she had seen her, her eyes were filled with judgement and slight disgust. Ringo didn't know what to trust.

Everyone had pitched in to help Ringo stuff her belongings into her mother's secondhand vehicle. Julia Wheeler had apologised to Ringo quietly on the side about how the car wasn't the nicest, but Ringo had assured her that she didn't expect anything more from her and she

was happy they were finally able to get a car at all.

The Wheeler family stayed on the lawn to wave away the mother and daughter as Julia pulled out of the driveway. Ringo waved and waved until her hand ached, not stopping or letting up until they had rounded the corner and disappeared from sight.

"Wait!" Karen and Nancy turned at the sound of a male voice shouting from down the street, their eyebrows scrunching in confusion almost identically when Steve Harrington had appeared in their view, sprinting towards the house at full speed.

"What the hell?" Nancy asked when he finally reached them, his face dark red and panting profusely as he rested his hands on his knees to catch his breath. "Why didn't you just drive?"

"Car... broke... down," he spoke between pants, waving her off and standing up straight. "Did she leave yet?"

"Yeah," Karen answered, eyeing him up carefully. "You ran all the way from your house?"

"Goddamnit," he swore, looking off in the direction her car had went and beginning to drag his hands through his already dishevelled hair, visibly distressed.

"What, Steve?" Nancy pressed, put off his bizarre behaviour and slightly suspicious.

"I wanted to say goodbye," was all he said, dropping his hands down to his sides with a small smack sound before turning and heading back the way he came, walking this time, his expression looking completely defeated.

Elsewhere in the car, Ringo had decided the awkward silence would be eased when she slipped her headphones on and slid her new mixtape into her player, laying back against her seat and looking out the window peacefully.

Don't Stop Believing by Journey had been the first song to play, and originally she had smirked at the slight cheesiness. But by the end of the song, Ringo found herself biting her lip profusely and holding

back tears from welling in her eyes.

Hello again! This is officially the last chapter in season one, so there will be a time jump after this but I won't be going straight to season two. I want a little time before all of that goes down to establish the differences I'll be making to season two. I hope everyone liked this chapter, it's the longest so far and I'm quite proud of it!

justanothermewlingquim - Awww thanks so much! That means a lot to me! Is Billy from florida? I thought he was from California, but none the less he will interact with Ringo in season two when she returns to Hawkins! Thank you so much for your lovely review, I hope you have a great day 3

harleyquinn87 - I don't either! But everything happens for a reason ;)

candy95 - Ringo didn't have much of a choice but to move back, after all she was only sent to Hawkins for a short while as a "punishment", but she'll be back soon! I wanted to send her home for some character development reasons, you'll see why! I hope you liked this chapter x

Court725 - Just for a short while! You'll barely notice with the time jump! Plus, absence makes the heart grow fonder ;) I hope you liked this one and what's to come, thanks so much for commenting 3

17. Slayer of Demons and Tyres

JUNE, 1984.

THE WARM SUMMER AIR LINGERED AFTER SUNSET, leaving the streets of Callahan ideal for the local teenagers to frolic carelessly. For one group in particular, their agenda for the evening had been purely based around celebration.

Perhaps their celebrations were premature, after all, high school didn't let out for Summer for another week. But for Ringo Wheeler and her gang of friends, the week was just the beginning of their Summer blowout.

The blonde wasn't cold at all, but Ronny insisted she wear his letterman jacket anyway - probably as a sign of ownership more than genuine concern for her being cold. If she were half sober Ringo would have been bothered, but as it turns out - the more and more she drank, the less she cared for her independent, girl power ideologies.

They had started drinking the second classes had finished earlier that day, Ringo's school bag still laying in the back of Jeff's truck as she hadn't even ventured home yet. The later it got, the less she wanted to return and receive what was sure to be a devouring from her mother.

Katie squealed girlishly as Jeff roamed his hand over her bottom, causing the rest of the group to erupt into giggles. Their evening had consisted of numerous forms of entertainment they concocted to humour themselves - ranging from dragging each other around in a stray shopping cart, to smoking weed in an abandoned swimming pool.

Unfortunately for her, Ringo was reaching the inevitable part of the night where the alcohol no longer made her giddy, instead, it brought her mood down tenfold. None of her 'friends' noticed her sudden change in demeanour, or at the very least, they didn't mention it.

She wasn't quite sure why the group had brought her in, they weren't

anything like the type of people Ringo liked to surround herself with. But when she first returned from Hawkins to Callahan High, her comeback was almost scarier than singlehandedly fending off an other worldly being.

Walking into the school that first day brought back a rush of memories, and none of them good. The sensation of being watched as she walked past, the constant humiliation about the fact *everyone* had seen her naked body - it was all too much to handle. In Hawkins, Ringo had Jessica, Steve, Nancy and Jonathan. In Orlando, she had no one.

To say she was fairly surprised when Katie Valentine, the single most popular girl in school, had asked if she wanted to sit with them at lunch would be an understatement. Ringo had pushed aside her distrust of the popular elite to accept her offer, figuring their ego would be easier handled than sitting alone at lunch.

It all took off from there, and soon enough the group welcomed Ringo in with open arms. It almost made her forget the friends she had back in Hawkins. *Almost*.

"Woah, isn't that *his* house?" Katie directed her question at Ringo, angling her head towards a quaint house to the right of them. Ringo visibly bristled at the sight of it.

"Yep," she answered drily. The house in question of course belonged to none other than Pete Townes, otherwise known as the asshole who hooked up with Ringo and showed everyone polaroids taken of her nude, sleeping body.

Pete hadn't been a problem for Ringo when she returned, in fact, the whole incident was pushed to the side now that she hung around with Katie and the gang. No one dared to yell derogatory comments at her when she walked the hallways, for fear of becoming a social pariah at the hands of Ronny and Jeff. Pete himself refused to even make eye contact with her.

"And isn't that his car?" Jeff questioned, a wide smirk appearing over his face. Ringo nodded her head silently, her lips curled in as she tried to mask her sudden uncomfortableness.

"Well, Townes' has a car," Ronny began, fishing for something in his pocket and unveiling a small pocket knife, beaming brilliantly as he held it up, "and I got this."

"No, that's not a good idea," Ringo shook her head adamantly. Drunk or not, she knew better than to toil with Pete. He had already stung her once.

"Ringo, baby," Ronny turned and draped his arm over shoulders, a lazy smile on his face as he pointed towards the car with the knife. "He humiliated you, made you a laughing stock in front of the whole school. Are you really gonna let him walk away from that without *any* repercussions?"

His words caused her face to flush in equal parts anger and embarrassment, she truly didn't think she'd ever be able to get over what he did to her.

"No, but if I got caught-"

"Leave her, Ronny," Jeff interjected, "I guess Wheeler left her balls behind in the trailer park."

The blonde narrowed her eyes dangerously at him after he spoke, gritting her teeth together, she reached for the blade and yanked it from Ronny's hand. Cheers of encouragement sounded from behind her as she marched towards the green car, unveiling the sharp blade by flicking the handle around.

She would show them exactly how tough she was. After all, she was *Ringo Wheeler*. The girl who fought off a real-life monster with an axe and lived to tell the tale. They had no idea how much *balls* she had.

Pushing aside the sober voice in her head screaming that this was a terrible idea, Ringo bent over and used all of her strength to run the knife into the back wheel of the car, creating a slit and eliciting a whoosh of air. The others whooped and hollered a couple of feet away as she followed suit with the other back wheel, fully intending to make sure he wouldn't be able to drive at all for a while.

As she moved towards the front, her actions were halted by the front

porch light flicking on, causing the group to silence and Ringo to freeze.

"Ringo, come on!" Ronny whisper shouted, beckoning wildly, but she could barely hear him over the sudden rush of blood in her ears. The sight of a dark figure appearing at the screen door was enough to break her out of her haze, but when she turned to run back to her friends, they had already started to sprint off down the street, leaving her with no choice but to follow after them.

"Come on, Wheeler!" Jeff yelled from far ahead, barking out a laugh as she pumped her legs as fast as she could to catch up to them. They began to slow down when they reached the second street over, hoping that they weren't being followed, only then was Ringo able to catch up.

"What the *fuck*!" Ringo bellowed the second she reached them, the group laughing and hunched over breathlessly.

"Come on, that was amazing!" Katie chuckled, panting relentlessly.

"You just fucking left me there!" Ringo shoved Ronny by the arm, causing him to stumble to the side, before shoving the handheld pocket knife back into his own hands.

"Come on, baby," he shrugged nonchalantly, "better to have one person brought down than the whole group right?"

Ringo narrowed her eyes at the ground, unable to form a response as he wrapped his arm back around her shoulders and pecked the top of her head condescendingly.

The only thing she was able to think of at that moment was how wrong she was in thinking they were like her group back in Hawkins.

More specifically, how Steve didn't run away from her. How he ran straight back rather heroically into the house, despite the risk to his own life, to make sure she would've been alright. And she was repaying that by refusing to reach out to him.

"You've *really* done it this time, Ringo Floyd Wheeler!" Her mother's

voice screamed the literal instant she stepped inside the apartment, causing her to stumble in surprise by the volume and sharpness of it.

The girl in question rubbed her eyes blearily, having to lean against the doorframe due to her weakened balance and squint at the clock on the wall to see what time it was. It read five in the morning, meaning her mother had stayed up all night until she arrived home.

Guilt would have rushed through her, but all Ringo was able to process at that moment was the pain in her ankle after she fell on the stairs in their apartment block, three whole times before reaching their floor. And how comfortable the ground looked right now.

"What?" She mumbled, her hands moving to grip onto the table to support herself. Ringo was sure she had never been so drunk in her life. She was already fairly intoxicated after the incident at the Townes' house, but when Jeff suggested continuing their drinking session in his basement, nobody disagreed.

"I got a call from Marissa Townes, who told me that her son saw *you* slashing his tyres, Ringo!" Her mother had never yelled so loud in her life, too consumed by anger to give a damn about the time or the neighbours she would be waking.

"Chill out, mom," Ringo held her hands up to the sides of her head, her dizziness overcoming her. "He's the asshole that sent those pictures around."

"So what?! You think that justifies what you did?!" She screamed in response, face as red as a tomato. "She wanted to call the *cops*, Ringo! The only reason she didn't is because I told her I would pay tomorrow for all the damages you caused!"

"I'm sorry, okay?" She grumbled, her eyes fluttering closed as she swayed on her feet. "Can we please have this conversation tomorrow?"

"Look at the *state* you have gotten yourself into. Do you want to add underage drinking to the list of illegal activities you committed tonight? Is there anything else I need to know about before the cops come pounding down my door?"

Before she could rant any further, Ringo couldn't hold it in. Bending over, the sickly blonde emptied the contents of her stomach and vomited all over the carpet, and her mothers slippers.

It was a morning like any other in the Wheeler household. Nancy and Mike bickered relentlessly over their bacon and eggs, Ted promptly pretended he couldn't hear them as he read the morning paper and Karen was trying to encourage her youngest daughter to eat up.

"All I'm saying is if you don't turn your music down after seven, I'm going to come in there and smash up your boom box," Nancy grinned sarcastically and spoke with a falsely sweet voice at Mike across the table, cutting through her bacon with a knife and fork.

"Why? Do you need the silence to hear Steve on the other line?" Mike dropped his fork to put his hands over his heart, screwing up his expression to mimic her. "Oh, Nancy! I haven't seen you in an hour! Please come to the window so I might look upon your ugly face!"

"No, I actually need peace and quiet so I can study! Some of us are going somewhere in life!" She fired back after rolling her eyes.

"Oh, I'm sorry, was it Jonathan on the other line then? Or are you still pretending you don't like each other?" His words caused her face to flush a dark red, lifting her foot up and sending it straight into Mike's shin bone, eliciting a yelp from him.

"Can you two just-" Karen whipped around, ready to give out to her arguing children, but was ultimately cut off by the shrill ring of the phone. The older woman sighed exasperatedly, dropping the spoon she was trying to drive into Holly's mouth. It was proving to be a futile attempt anyway, the toddler was only interested in Froot Loops.

"Hello?" She answered politely, throwing Nancy and Mike a sharp glare to silence them when they kicked off again.

"Karen," Julia sighed into the receiver, scraping her free fingers through her dark blonde hair before flicking the ash building at the end of her cigarette off.

"Julia!" Karen smiled, having not heard from the woman in months. Perhaps it was deemed inappropriate to talk with your husband's recently deceased brother's widow, when said widow was in the middle of divorce proceedings when the death occurred. "How are you doing?"

"Fine..." she lied, leaning back against the doorframe as she carefully eyed her daughter's bedroom door. "Alright, not fine."

"Why? What's the problem?" She pressed, rolling her eyes as Ted's hearing magically seemed to kick back in, her husband now fully paying attention to her conversation out of nosiness.

"It's Ringo, Karen," Julia continued, her voice thick with exhaustion. "I mean... it's been a month since he passed away. And I understand that he was her father, but she's been getting into more and more trouble since she came back to Florida, even before Barry-" Julia's voice choked up with emotion, deciding to end that sentence there. "She's completely off the rails, was she like this in Hawkins? Did something happen to her there?"

"Not that I'm aware of," Karen answered and placed her hand on her chest out of worry, wondering perhaps if the events at Halloween were having a part in Ringo's newfound chaotic tendencies. But of course, she couldn't tell Julia that. "Why, what happened exactly?"

"She's failing classes. She skips school and doesn't tell me, I find out from the school secretary who calls me while I'm at *work*. More than enough nights she disappears down the fire escape and comes home drunk, but last night was the final straw. I've completely lost control her of, Karen," the teenager's mother held back cries building in her throat, running her hand over her face after extinguishing what felt like her millionth cigarette that morning alone.

"Julia... that breaks my heart to hear," Karen admitted sadly, "when she was with us - she got good grades, never skipped school... maybe something is going on at school? I know she was bullied there after what happened last year."

"Or maybe it's me..." Julia whispered, hating that she felt a little insulted about how well Ringo thrived in Hawkins. It was no secret to

her that she wasn't always the best of mothers, a trailer park was never the place she truly wanted to raise a baby. But life had gotten in the way, and Ringo had to grow up seeing things she never wanted her daughter to see in her lifetime - never mind as a child. Now, she was flourishing into a young woman, and Julia was completely losing grip of steering her into the right direction. There was only so many times she got that drunk before something bad would happen.

"Maybe Ringo would like to stay with us during Summer?" Karen offered after a beat of silence, causing everyone's heads to snap up at her words. Ted began to shake his head, eyes wide as he thought of having yet another moody teenager in the house. Karen waved off her husband's silent refusal with her hand, turning back to the phone. "Perhaps she needs to get away from Orlando, I'm sure she doesn't want the reminder of her father there. Not to mention, it'll give you some peace of mind for a while."

"Karen, I could never impose on you like that again.." Julia denied weakly, biting her nails as she contemplated the offer. She was on the brink of losing her job if she came in late yet another morning because her only child was sobbing relentlessly as she vomited into the toilet, this was the fourth occasion.

"You're not imposing, we loved having Ringo here before!" Karen urged, eyeing up her children's mixed reactions. Mike's lips had lifted into an excited smile, while Nancy's appeared more forced, something Karen noted she would have to enquire about later.

"I'm going to have a talk with her," Julia settled, mulling over the offer and finding herself unable to make such a decision so easily. Perhaps a change would be good for the teenager, who thrived academically and morally in Hawkins, previously. But Julia herself wasn't sure she could bear the thought of being alone for a few months, especially now that her husband was gone. As troubled as their marriage became at the end, he was still the love of her life.

Another solution proposed itself in her mind then, one that could either prove to be disastrous or mutually beneficial for both of them. But first, she would have to make some calls.

"I can't believe this is the end of my junior year, I'm supposed to be *graduating* this time next year," Steve babbled on in the drivers seat, turning the wheel occasionally to stay on route. Nancy hadn't been listening for some time now, but she knew that with a nod of her head and a small smile - any man would believe that she was.

It was their final day of school, much to their shared relief, and Steve had offered to take Nancy to Brainshakes for a celebratory milkshake and bowl of fries. But the Wheeler girl was mentally preoccupied, she had been ever since yesterday.

It wasn't that she resented her cousin, truly she didn't. They had drifted slightly since Halloween, that much was true, but she couldn't bring herself to hate Ringo Wheeler. She knew that Ringo would never purposefully intend to develop feelings for Steve, and she definitely would never act upon them.

But, perhaps, it wasn't Ringo's advances that she was weary about.

As if to taunt her, a familiar song sounded through the radio by a band that was ever so repeatedly drawn back to her blonde-haired cousin. She watched with an ache in her heart as Steve reached for the knob, turning the volume up until the slow, sultry sounds of 'Gypsy' by Fleetwood Mac began to flood through the car.

It wasn't as if Steve was having an affair behind her back, she *knew* her jealousy and distrust was misplaced. Steve hadn't even seen Ringo since her departure, nor had he spoken to her - at Ringo's request.

But now there was a possibility that she was coming back. Nancy wasn't sure if she'd be able to hold onto Steve after that.

Sighing frustratedly, she reached for the knob and swiftly turned it down to silence. Steve threw her an incredulous look as a result, copying her action, but instead turning it the opposite direction.

"Steve, don't," she warned halfway through his turn of the knob. Smartly, he recognised the tone in her voice and let it go, sighing as he did so.

That *cursed* band, Nancy thought. Steve would never have been

caught dead listening to them before Ringo arrived, but now he was suddenly a fan. Something about that didn't sit quite right with her.

So when they arrived at Brainshakes in silence, she plastered a small, innocent smile on her face as she always did. Hoping it would be enough until she could rush home and call the only person in her life she trusted with her many secrets - Jonathan.

Hello hello! I'm back with another chapter. It's been over a week now, I'd say, but I've had so much going on it was hard finding time to dedicate myself to writing.

I'd like to think this book has three parts. The first was the chapters before this aka season one, the second will now be the chapters preceding season two and season two itself. It's obvious by this chapter that it will have a slightly darker tone than the first season, but I feel there's a lot of character development to be made for Ringo and I don't want her to be seen as this perfect character. I love the OC I have made, but a flawless character isn't interesting for anyone!

Don't worry, it won't be long before she's back in Hawkins with the gang, and the next chapter will feature Steve more than this one did. I would like to write a few chapters before episode one of season two, if that's okay with everyone? That way there'll be more time for Steve and Ringo's relationship to grow and more of a build up to his eventual break up with Nancy.

Thanks so much for reading and I'll see you all very soon!

Guest - You'll see in the next chapter how she's going to return, but as for now, her mom just wants what's best for her after her father's death! I can't wait for her to butt heads with Billy! Also, I listened to the song you suggested and I LOVE it! It's very Stingo! Thanks so much for your review!

candy95 - This chapter was a little bleak as an introduction to season two, but there's a lot of things to come and I hope that you'll like it!

Casofilica - That makes me so happy that you consider her to be realistic, that's exactly what I was hoping for! I completely agree, I'd love to read more Steve fics, there's just never enough!

Guest - Ahhh thank you! Ringo's sarcasm and Mike's insults are my favourite things to write!

edrch - That makes me so happy to hear, thank you so much! I'm looking forward to writing the next few chapters!

bwoflo - MINE ARE TOO. Have a lovely day and I hope you like this next part of the book 3

Guest - And I can't wait for you to read what's to come! Thanks for your comment! x

Court725 - I love that you remembered the reference! That's exactly why I want to write a few chapters preceding the events of season two, so when they fall for each other they fall hard ;) thank you so much!

swanqueen4 - hOLY Crap that is such an amazing compliment, that means the world to me, I can't thank you enough! I hope this chapter and the next do the characters justice then! Thanks again!

18. Vodka Punch Virginity

"GET UP NOW, BEFORE I KEY YOUR VINYLs," was the first words Ringo Wheeler heard that day.

Blearily, she opened her eyes, immediately shutting them again thereafter as she was forced to acknowledge the pain throbbing through her skull. The blonde let out a low groan, reaching up to clutch her forehead, as if it would ease her agony. Hangovers were definitely not something she'd ever get used to.

"Is that how it's gonna be?" Her mother interrupted her self-loathing, prompting Ringo to flick the blankets away from her face to catch sight of the older woman as she headed towards her vinyl rack. "Lets see... *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust*? I hope that's not your favourite."

"Woah, woah! I'm up, I'm up!" Ringo howled, forcing her body into a sitting position and resisting the urge to fall back down as overwhelming nausea overcame her. She was *never* drinking again.

"Good!" Julia clapped her hands once, turning to leave her room, and her vinyls, alone. "You have five minutes to puke up whatever you have to puke, and then you're meeting me in the kitchen. We need to talk."

Oh no, Ringo thought worriedly, throwing the duvet back and stumbling out of the bed, cringing as she caught sight of herself in the mirror. She was obviously too drunk to remove her make up the night before, something her skin would punish her for in the coming days.

Instead of vomiting as her mother expected, she spent the five free minutes she was granted cleansing the smudged make up away, then tossing her scruffy hair into a ponytail, trying desperately to remember what actually happened the night before.

"Sit down, Ringo," her mother commanded, and she obeyed her without hesitation. Her mother hadn't used such a strict tone with her since her father had passed, and that fact had made her nervous.

Especially if the stern set of her jaw and her fierce gaze were anything to go by. Perhaps she didn't want to remember what went down at all.

"I quit my job today," she revealed, causing the younger girl to sputter in shock. "I quit my job because of *you*."

"W-what do you mean because of me?"

"We're not living like this any more, Ringo. That mess you had gotten yourself into last year, I thought that was your lowest point. But you've been drinking almost every day, and now you're committing vandalism. I don't know what to do with you any more, you're breaking my heart." Her words were like a memory serum injected directly into Ringo's veins, forcing everything to come back from the night in question. The punctured tyres, the vomiting, the attitude she held when speaking with her concerned parent. Shame, regret and guilt washed over her like a wave. It was rather easy to dub it as the biggest regret of her life, thus far.

"Mom..." she began, her voice thick with emotion - and from the hangover. "I'm so sorry. I can't even begin to apologise... please just-let me make it up to you? You didn't need to quit over me! Please, call them back!"

"I won't be calling anyone, Ringo," she answered sternly, cocking an eyebrow. "I've made all the calls I needed to make. I'll be going to the supermarket later to pick up a few empty boxes, and when I return with them, you're going to start packing."

"Packing?" She echoed. Surely her mother wasn't shipping her away *again*?

"Yes," she confirmed, causing Ringo to visibly deflate. Sure, she was struggling, but her mother needed her. And truth be told, she needed her mother. "Both of us."

Her head snapped up at her mother's final words.

"W-... why? Where are we going?"

"Hawkins."

"To live with Karen and Ted?" She tilted her head in confusion. Surely they couldn't *both* live in Nancy's room?

"No, we'll be renting a place somewhere. Karen is helping me sort out the details. We'll both be living there, as a fresh start. And I hope to god you take this as a new beginning, Ringo. Because I am at my wit's end with you," her small speech ended with what felt like a threat, or at least, Ringo accepted it as one.

She stayed silent as her muddled mind attempted to process what this would mean for her. Naturally, she'd be spending her senior year at Hawkins - where she would regularly see Jessica, Nancy... and Steve.

While the idea of having a friend who truly cared about her well-being made Ringo want to pack up and hitchhike to Indiana that instant, the image in her mind of Steve Harrington quelled any building excitement. Instead, it filled her with a slight sense of dread.

But the decision wasn't a decision at all. And at that moment, she'd have run to Alaska and back just so her mother wouldn't look so deeply disappointed in her. If a relocation was what it took to gain her forgiveness, she'd have no choice but to pack her things.

Steve Harrington was entrusted with his house alone far too often.

His parents weren't exactly the trusting type, 'blissfully ignorant' was a better descriptive term. His father was a workaholic to a fault, or at least he *claimed* to be. Steve had his suspicions when the man of the house came home from a business trip to 'Seattle' slightly more tanned, with a wide smile.

Most boys his age would call it a blessing, especially considering his social standing. Anyone else would have dreamed to be able to open up their house for wild parties once a month or so, but Steve had grown to resent the loneliness. He had no siblings, not even a dog to keep him company. And it wasn't like Nancy would have been allowed to stay overnight, her mother would sooner stay with Steve than allow Nancy to.

It was both convenient and rather unsurprising that his house was

empty once again just in time for the start of Summer break. Considering it was hopefully Steve's last Summer before heading off for college after senior year, he intended to start it off with a bang.

"Do we need more potato chips?" Nancy asked, as she poured a bag into a bowl in preparation. It was almost nine, and soon enough others would be arriving. Nancy had offered to help Steve set up the house beforehand.

"Nancy, they're here for the beer not for the snacks," he smiled cheekily at her, setting up the tap for the keg he had managed to score from his numerous connections.

The brunette didn't speak again until she had poured a ladle full of punch into her cup. Instantly, her face screwed up in disgust.

"Steve! Did you spike your own punch?" She scolded, lowering the red cup and sticking her tongue out childishly at the aftertaste.

"I only took the punch bowl's virginity, someone *had* to take one for the team," he shrugged innocently, prompting his girlfriend to roll her eyes at her goofy boyfriend and lift the cup back up to her lips.

The doorbell rang shrilly through the house, causing the corners of his mouth to lift up in a grin of excitement. As he trailed off towards the front door, he slipped the cassette tape he had kept aside for large parties into the slot in his stereo, turning it up loud when the music began to flood through the speakers.

The party was raging on for hours, and with no sign of stopping any time soon. Loud and heavy beats vibrated the house and surely had become the bane of every nearby neighbours existence.

Steve was the life of the party, as he always was. And while he never strayed too far from Nancy's side, the constant attention from people trying to talk to him had distracted him from how much Nancy had been drinking.

The girl herself hadn't realised she was pushing her limits until the giddiness had simmered down into annoyance and impatience. The slightest of things were getting to her, and she wasn't sure if it was

because of the alcohol, her mother's revelation earlier or the fact Pam Holland was practically *drooling* over Steve.

"Could fill a bucket with that drool," she mumbled angrily into her cup, her rants going unnoticed. "Have something to water the plants with."

As if by chance, she cast a glance around the packed living room, just in time to notice a familiar looking, gangly boy step through the doorway.

Nancy smiled, teetering away from Steve's side with a slight stumble in her step and heading straight for Jonathan, immediately enveloping him in a hug that had caught him totally by surprise.

Sure, he and Nancy were friends. But they were never really *physical* with their friendship.

"Hiiiiii, Jonathan!" She cooed, squeezing him tightly before leaning back and tousling his hair.

"Hey, Nancy," he replied, his expression twisted in surprise at her appearance. She looked good, she always did, but she also looked beyond drunk. He had never seen Nancy get herself into a state like this, and it was beginning to worry him.

"I'm so glad you're here," she huffed out a breath of air, shoving her loose locks of hair behind her ears and flopping down on the couch.

Jonathan awkwardly fidgeted, before dropping to sit next to her, encouraged by the way she patted the couch cushion next to her.

"Are you okay?" He asked out of concern, not failing to see how her lower lip jutted out and her gaze fixed on the carpet, almost in a daze.

"No," she whined, childishly. "Everything's just bullshit, isn't it? Look at all these people *partying* when Barb is dead. She's *dead* and still, they don't even care. They never cared about her."

"I-..." Jonathan began, grimacing at the subject choice and Nancy's obvious sadness as he debated with himself on how to be sensitive

with this. "They're assholes, yeah? Barb wouldn't want you to care about what they thought."

Nancy lifted her drooping eyes to meet his gaze, forcing her lips into a small smile that looked positively saddening.

"You didn't really know her well, but she was a good friend. Just like *youuuu*," she babbled, shoving her index finger against his shoulder.

Across the room, Steve Harrington had finally managed to find a loophole out of his conversation with Pam, using Nancy's absence as an excuse to leave a second after he noticed she wasn't by his side.

He turned around, his back to the redhead in the hopes she wouldn't try to restart a conversation, and from there he was able to see where his girlfriend had gotten off to.

On a couch, next to Jonathan that was.

Steve let out a small sigh of relief that she hadn't wandered too far, but that small sliver of satisfaction dropped to paranoia when Jonathan had stood up and offered Nancy his hand to help her up, too.

"What's going on?" Steve blurted out the second he was close enough for them to hear, just as they were getting ready to head off for the front entrance.

"I'm gonna give her a ride home," Jonathan gestured weakly with his thumb over his shoulder, casting his gaze away out of fear for his fellow teenager.

"But your mom said she would come at eleven thirty?" Steve pressed, his eyes fixed on Nancy and ignoring her little friend, who's hand was still wrapped in hers. Something that was beginning to royally piss him off.

"I want to go now," Nancy stammered over her words, forcing him to realise the extent of her intoxication.

"Nancy, can I talk to you? Alone?" He pleaded, placing his hand on her forearm gently and silently begging her with his eyes when her

expression appeared as if she was going to say no.

"Fine," Nancy muttered, allowing Steve to lead her over to the corner so they could discuss away from listening ears.

"What's going on with you?" Steve inquired, jumping to the point.

"Oh, what are you talking about?" She rolled her eyes, hurting his feelings slightly although he'd never have admitted that to her.

"You've been acting off for a few days now," he stated, but Nancy chose not to respond, looking at him in boredom.

It's just the alcohol, Steve tried to tell himself. Nancy is a bad drunk. It's not personal.

"Well... acting off with *me*, not with Jonathan, of course," he regretted it the second the words slipped out, but he wasn't about to take them back.

"This Jonathan thing again?" She whined in a high pitched voice, rubbing her left eye with her fingers. "I told you, we're just friends!"

"And you and I are *just* dating," he bit back, proceeding to take a deep breath to calm down before he said anything else he'd regret.

"You're a hypocrite, you know that?" She hissed, her increasingly loud voice causing him to dart his eyes around with paranoia.

"What is that supposed to mean?" He hushed, hoping she'd catch the hint to be more quiet.

"You act like everything's all amazing with us, like we're so in love. You get jealous Jonathan to hide the fact that, actually you wanted my cousin more than me," Nancy was spewing the words like vomit, but there was no stopping her now. Her thoughts had been bottled for so long, there's only so much a diary would do.

"*Like* we're in love?" He whispered, eyebrows furrowed in hurt and confusion. Nancy's expression softened when she realised her choice of words, but almost instantly hardened again when she remembered their discussion.

"You act like you're so innocent here," she scoffed, taking a step forward so they were closer together than before, her face just inches from his and her breath smelling sickly sweet from the punch. "How would you feel if I said that Ringo was coming back?"

His reaction, to her, was confirmation. His expression had morphed from hurt, to surprise, to wonderment. Eyes becoming wide and eyebrows raising, his lips parted and his gaze flicked back and forth between her eyes. If she could hear his heart, she was sure it would have picked up.

"That's what I thought," she mumbled, snapping him from his daze into a shroud of regret and guilt.

He could do nothing but watch as Nancy pushed past him and rejoined Jonathan at the door.

This chapter was a little rushed as I fell asleep three times editing it last night and now I'm uploading it whilst simultaneously applying make up before I leave, my life is THAT hectic right now.

I hope you enjoyed this chapter! Just one more chapter before Ringo returns to Hawkins finally! She'll be living with her mother this time, who will play more of a part in the 'season two' of this book, as will Jessica and Billy.

Thanks to everyone who read/or reviewed the previous chapter!

PondLake - I was wondering if anyone else picked up on her middle name! I'm so glad you like the direction I have planned, I was worried people wouldn't so thank you soooo much, love you! 3

bwoflo - I'm looking forward to writing it! Thanks for reviewing x

candy95 - Some tension, but not for long! I always strive to avoid falling into the trope most books/shows fall into where two female characters fight, I love positive female relationships

too much to allow Ringo and Nancy to fully hate each other. I don't think it fits their character for them to fully fight over a guy. I'm glad you approve of the pre-season 2 chapters idea! I think it'll give them time to develop their relationships and characters further!

psychosae - Another update for ya! Thanks so much and I hope you have a lovely day x

Court725 - She'll definitely be spending senior year there, I can tell you that ;) ahh I'm glad you liked that! I want to show more of Jonathan and Nancy post-season one and pre-season two for the ultimate angst muahah. I hope you liked this chapter!

kate Langdon - thanks so much sweetie! x

19. 100 Gas

"I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'LL BE MISSING SENIOR YEAR, BEATLE," Katie piped up from the back seat. The group of four were seated in Ronny's car, with Ronny himself and Ringo in the front and Jeff alongside Katie in the back. The blonde fought the grimace that threatened to form on her face from Katie's use of her newfound nickname, which the other girl knew full well that Ringo hated.

"Yeah, but I'm sure we'll write all the time, right!" She forced a smile on her lips, getting a dreadful sense that this was the last time the group would be speaking to her.

"Yeah," Jeff answered while everyone else nodded, the lack of enthusiasm was evident in all except Katie, but even hers appeared fake to a degree. She didn't dare to hold a false sense of hope that they'd stay in contact after she moved. The events the other night had lifted a veil from her eyes and allowed her to see just how true her friends were.

"I can't believe you threw up on your mom, that's so *sick*," Ronny smirked, but Ringo didn't share his amusement. Her actions had shamed her to death since it happened, almost two weeks ago, the only emotion overriding embarrassment was guilt. Now, she was seated in a car saying goodbye to the only friends she had over the last few months.

"Yeah," Ringo agreed weakly, "probably going to have to go for a Sober Summer until things cool down."

"That reminds me!" Katie spoke in a high pitched voice, "we have a present for you!"

"Really?" A warm smile crept its way onto her face, perhaps they truly *did* care. "You guys didn't have to do that!"

"Nonsense," Ronny cocked an eyebrow, reaching his hand behind him for Jeff to hand him the gift bag. Once retrieved, he passed it along to Ringo. She decided that it could have been a rock from the Floridian grounds and she wouldn't have minded, it was the thought that had

counted.

But that was until she peered into the bag and realised they had gotten her the one thing she truly didn't want or need at that minute.

"Oh, it's a bottle of vodka," she exclaimed with fake excitement, swallowing down the slightly offended feeling that washed over her. "Thanks, guys."

"Only the best for you, Ringo," Jeff clapped his massive hand on her shoulder as she slipped the bottle back into the bag.

Deciding that she should end the farewell then, Ringo thanked them for being friends to her, subsequently making promises of staying in contact that she knew she'd never keep. When she stepped out of the car to head back inside her apartment building, Ronny began to drive off. And that was the end of it, simple and not at all homely.

Ringo walked back towards her building, grimacing at the thought of the packing she had left to do before they left in the morning. Until she spotted a lone figure seated on the steps, that made her freeze.

Her steps halted immediately, face paling when she saw the man who she singlehandedly blamed for all of her problems.

"Pete," she smiled tightly, taking a few steps forward and anxiously gripping her keys tighter. "What do you want?"

His head shot up at her voice, clumsily rushing to stand up from the step, assuring Ringo that it *was* her he was waiting for.

"Ringo- I..." he began, brushing his hands against the back of his jeans. If she were a fool, she'd believe him to be nervous. "I heard you were leaving town."

"Yep," she responded drily, crossing her arms over her chest. The only reason she was even giving him the time of day was in case he managed to convince his mother to press charges against her.

"Right," he agreed dumbly, nodding his head. He was silent for a minute, leading her to cock an eyebrow.

"Did you want something, or...?"

"I wanted to apologise," he sputtered, taking her completely by surprise. Ringo crossed her arms over her chest protectively, glancing down at her scuffling feet for a second.

"Why, now?"

"I figured if you leave now then I'll never get the chance to," he explained, swallowing hard. "I'm sorry that I took those photos and shared them around. I don't know what had gotten into my head, I just... I wanted to look cool, I guess. And you were one of the hottest girls in school."

Ringo stared silently at him for a minute, her eyes practically piercing through his skull.

"So..." he murmured awkwardly when she didn't respond, scratching the back of his head, "are we cool?"

"Are we *cool*?" She hissed, taking the final step forward so they were as close as could be without touching, aside from the finger she was now jabbing in his chest. "No we're not fucking *cool*! You ruined my life! All because you wanted a bit of popularity? If you weren't at least dropped as a child, you must have been thrown at a wall!"

"Calm down," he held his hands in the air in defence, infuriating her even further.

"Don't tell me to calm down," she seethed, narrowing her eyes furiously. "I don't accept your apology, so *get lost*."

"Fine, Jesus," he whistled, turning to the side and stomping off towards his newly fixed car, muttering along the way. "Bitch was bad in bed anyway."

"Oh, *I'm* bad in bed?" She called out after him, uncaring for the bystanders who's attention she now had. "Because you finished! And I didn't!"

With that line, she turned her head so quickly that her blonde hair whipped through the air and stepped back inside the building,

thankful this was her final day in Florida.

As it turns out, the price of renting a two-bedroom apartment in Orlando was almost the same as renting a small house in Hawkins, Indiana. Although she had been slightly nervous about her return to Hawkins, Ringo adored the small house her mother had procured for them. It was quaint and cozy, and more than enough for the two of them. It was the nicest place she had lived in all her life.

The town was a thirty minute drive from Fort Wayne, where Julia Wheeler intended to look to find a new job as soon as she could.

It dawned on Ringo the risk her mother was taking in moving - quitting her job that provided stability and healthcare to uproot herself and move to another state. The teenager only hoped that Julia found some solace in moving away from Orlando too, as she knew the memories of her late husband were just as proficient as Ringo's.

They had been travelling back and forth between the car, carting boxes of their belongings to and fro. Thankfully, the apartment came fully furnished, and neither woman held much sentiment for their larger furniture back in Orlando enough to bring it with them.

As soon as all of the boxes had finally been set down in the hallway, they stopped to catch their breath and take in their surroundings. Julia smiled softly, resting her arm around her daughter's shoulders.

"You're lucky I love you, kid," she teased, squeezing her arm gently. "They don't even have a McDonald's here."

Ringo smiled weakly, that same sense of guilt that had become all too familiar creeping up again.

"Karen invited us for dinner at the Wheelers tonight, so we don't have to worry about cooking," the older woman announced as she reached for the first box, taking note of the '*kitchen*' writing on the side and trailing off to the room.

"Great," Ringo grinned genuinely, excited to see her cousins once more, but slightly unsure if her cousins were excited to see *her*.

"Ringo!" Mike exclaimed, being the one to be open the door. His eagerness and excitement warmed her heart, and almost immediately she bent slightly to hug him in return as he reached for her. It seemed that he had grown so much, even over the course of six months.

"Hey!" She beamed, squeezing him back and rubbing her knuckles against his scalp.

"It's about time you're back, asking Nancy for help with Math homework is like pulling claws from a cat," he rolled his eyes, prompting her to playfully shove him in Nancy's defence.

"Ringo!" Karen called out happily as she appeared from the kitchen. Her heart warmed slightly as the older woman engulfed her as well. She even missed her step aunt, who acted as a second mother during her original stay in Hawkins.

"Julia, how are you doing?" Karen smiled comfortingly at her, noticing the mother's awkward stance by the front door. She was hesitant about accepting the invitation to dinner, after all she *was* in the middle of a divorce when her husband had passed.

This was her husband's relatives, not hers.

As Karen dragged Julia off to the kitchen, chattering happily, while Mike had run off to the basement with his walkie talkie - Ringo stopped at the sound of a creak on the stairs.

Her grin felt a little more forced when Nancy had come into view, purely because she could tell by the girl's demeanour she wasn't as excited as her mother and brother to reconnect with her cousin.

"Hi!" Ringo greeted happily, grinning as Nancy continued down the stairs.

"Hey," she waved back in return, the dimples in her cheek indented in a way that told Ringo her smile was indeed false, as well.

"I missed you," she admitted, awkwardly holding her hands out to her for a hug. The words seemed to break some of Nancy's tension.

"I missed you too, Ringo," she visibly relaxed and rushed forward to wrap her arms around the taller blonde. They stood for a moment, hugging out the awkwardness that Ringo wasn't quite sure about the reason it had formed.

"My room is too quiet without your snoring," Nancy teased after pulling away, nudging her shoulder.

"My room smells too normal now that your night gas doesn't flood it up," she fired back, narrowing her eyes playfully.

"Hey!" Nancy scoffed as they began to walk to the kitchen. "I do *not* fart in my sleep."

"I sure hope you do, because if it's not a fart then you're 100% shitting yourself in bed."

Ringo and Jessica had a designated spot they agreed to meet at in town, which was the corner right across from the movie theatre.

The two had kept in contact since December, probably more so than she had with anyone else in Hawkins. Jessica had been absolutely ecstatic when she learned that Ringo was returning, which was probably the most emotion she had ever seen emit from the girl.

Julia had been iffy about letting her daughter out of the house so easily to meet her friends, but ultimately decided it was harmless as their reunion took place during the day. Besides, Jessica was the only friend Ringo had that actually *didn't* drink.

Thankfully, their house was within walking distance of town, even closer than Nancy's house had been. Ringo's mother had set off to Fort Wayne on a job search since that morning, although reluctantly. Even leaving during the day was entrusting Ringo a lot more than she did at the moment.

Ringo waited at the small convenience store Jessica had suggested, a small smile on her lips as she recalled one of the times she had visited it before. It was a little before the events of Halloween, when her biggest problem had been Tommy and Carol. She chuckled lowly

at the thought of spraying Coke all over Carol, despite the fact they had since reconciled their differences.

The sound of feet hitting the ground behind her rang in her ears, but she hadn't quite registered it before all of a sudden, arms encircled her and were lifting her enough for her feet to dangle off the ground.

"*What the fuck?*" She shouted as the person finally lowered her down, whipping around with her fist in the air and ready to strike her attacker. However she was met with long hair and excited brown eyes that made her fist, and her heart, stop immediately.

"Ringo!" Steve Harrington beamed, wrapping his arms around her again and hugging her, but she was too in shock to even react. He didn't even seem the slightest bit angry that she had been ignoring his calls as of late, which absolutely baffled her.

He had been the one person she *dreaded* seeing again, and she had no one to blame but herself.

After realising she wasn't going to hug him back, he let go of her as if it burned him, taking a step back awkwardly and scanning her from head to toe, taking in her appearance.

"I wasn't sure when you were coming back, Nancy didn't tell me when," there was something in his voice that told her there was more to that story, but she didn't press it at the time.

"Y-yeah," she smiled weakly, holding her hands out and gesturing around. "I'm back! Permanently, I guess."

"You should have called and told me!" Steve still held a smirk that made her heart clench, it was a reminder that he was yet another person in her life that she had let down, that didn't deserve it. "I'm throwing you a party the second my parents ditch me again."

"No!" She said too quickly, causing him to frown in confusion. "I mean... no parties."

"It's really great to see you, Ringo," he told her, full of sincerity. She tried to fight the blush that crept up on her cheeks, but it was practically impossible. His hair had grown slightly longer, making

him look even more handsome than usual.

"It's-" Ringo began, but was cut off by a shout of her name from behind her. She turned in time to catch, this time, Jessica before she latched onto her like a koala bear.

"Oh thank god! You're here to save the town from the jocks again!" Jessica spoke in a pleading tone, causing her to laugh and squeeze her back as equally as forcefully. Steve's smile dimmed slightly upon noticing how she reciprocated Jessica's embrace, but tried not to dwell on it.

"Oh snap, there's one right here," Jessica muttered when they pulled apart and she saw Steve standing, uncomfortable.

"Jessica and I have... plans," Ringo informed him, hoping he would take the hint - thankfully, he did.

"Yeah! No, yeah! I'll just... call me when you're free to hang out, okay?" His tone ended in one of confusion, but truly, he was confused.

The unanswered phone calls had offended him over the last few weeks, but he had tried to tell himself it was nothing more than Ringo being busy. Now, here she was, and even colder than when they had first met.

He stood dumbly for a minute, watching as the blonde turned and began to march up the street, chattering happily with her friend and wondering why he wasn't the friend she was so excited to see any more.

Nobody get too mad at Ringo for being a little standoffish, she's trying to stay away from Steve for Nancy's sake (but that won't last long hehe).

Thanks everyone who read and/or reviewed the previous chapter! x

Vince Basile Jr - An update for ya! x

candy95 - I 100% agree about Max and El, they had so much

potential to be friends as El doesn't really have any female relationships in her life and right away she hates her for being around Mike. It doesn't really make sense to me, I really hope they sort out their differences. Thank you! Have a wonderful day! x

Court725 - No bad blood, just a little temporary tension! I'd never separate them for long I love their bond as well aha, I can't wait for mama Steve but I also can't wait to write papa Ringo ;)

20. Footloose

"**WHO'S READY TO GET LOOSE, FOOTLOOSE-**" An overactive blonde's voice burst through the basement, taking the stairs down at a rapid rate, until her voice cut off before she could sing the theme tune as she noticed the occupants in the room.

Ringo Wheeler was sure she looked as if she bit into a lemon, her lips pursed uncomfortably and her grip tightening on the video tape of the aforementioned movie in her hand.

"*Footloose?!*" Mike exclaimed in annoyance, throwing his hands up in the air. His voice was followed by shouts of disagreement from the three friends next to him. "You were *supposed* to get Ghostbusters!"

"Unless the ghosts start shaking their butts to a rocking soundtrack, we are *not* watching it! And besides, it's my turn to pick!" She rolled her eyes after speaking, fighting against the blush rising in her cheeks from her momentary stumble.

The 'Wheeler Family Friday' was a relatively new tradition for the three Wheeler teenagers, first originating two weeks ago, when Ringo had returned to Hawkins. It was a night the trio intended to make a habit of, meeting in the basement to watch a movie and binge on snacks. Word had gotten round to Mike's friends, who had invited themselves the week before and apparently this week too. It had suddenly become 'Wheeler Family Friday with Dustin, Lucas and Will'.

And now Steve, apparently.

Steve didn't greet Ringo as he usually would have, for this had been the first time he even saw her since they met in town two weeks before. The girl was making obvious attempts to avoid him, and Steve Harrington would only embarrass himself a few times before giving up on her completely.

"Hey, I want to see Footloose, too!" Nancy complained, nudging her foot against Mike's back as he sat on the floor in front of the couch she was seated at.

"Why don't you get *Footlost!*" He fired back.

"You boys should be watching this stuff," Ringo drawled sarcastically as she practically climbed over the boys to get to the open space next to Nancy, ignoring Steve who was on the other side of her. "Maybe it'll give you tips on how to get girlfriends."

"You don't need to be so obvious, Ringo," Dustin practically gloated from the carpet, rolling onto his elbows and making a purring noise at her with his newly formed teeth.

She rolled her eyes, unable to fight off the amusement from her face as she settled the plastic bag full of pure junk food onto the couch and headed towards the TV that was settled into the corner.

"Dibs the Pudding Pie!" Steve hollered, reaching for the Hostess candy from the bag as the boys scrambled over one another towards it.

"What?! No!" Lucas groaned, having had his eyes peeled on the brown wrapper since spying it through the plastic bag when Ringo entered.

"You weren't even invited, dude!" Mike huffed, rifling through the bag and whipping out a pack of Bugles.

"Nancy invited me, twerp!"

"Nancy does dumb things all the time, it is known," Mike commented drily.

"It is known," Ringo echoed in amusement after sliding the cassette into the VCR. She froze after hearing herself, realising that her words could have sounded like she didn't want Steve there either.

Thankfully, before it could get awkward, the basement door opened again, revealing Jonathan Byers.

"Wait, I don't have to go, do I?" Will asked, his face screwing up at the idea of having to leave the party so early. His mother was overprotective lately, appropriately so, but he hoped she would let him stay the night at Mike's.

"No- I... um... Nancy invited me," Jonathan awkwardly stuttered, gesturing to the smiling brunette on the couch. His voice caught Ringo's attention, her eyebrows furrowing as she stepped around the wall and beamed brightly.

"Jonathan!" She exclaimed happily, rushing forward and practically leaping to hug him tightly. Jonathan's eyes were wide with surprise, her actions and presence taking him off guard.

As she hugged him, her grin began to falter slightly upon noticing the crestfallen expression on Steve's face in the background.

"I knew you were back, I just didn't get a chance to catch up with you yet," he explained when they pulled away, timidly tucking his hair behind his ears.

"I missed you, Byers, Florida has a real lack of shy weirdos," she winked to show she was joking, clapping him on the arm before skipping back to the couch, next to Nancy.

They shimmied up so there was enough room for Jonathan next to her, which was a more tense affair than any of them initially expected as the movie began to play.

Steve was silent throughout, unsure if he was more uncomfortable with Nancy having invited Jonathan or with Ringo for blatantly ignoring him, but excitedly embracing Jonathan. Whatever the cause, the other three picked up on it immediately, and were just as tense for it.

It was an entirely different atmosphere from Halloween, Ringo realised. And she hated it. Instead of focusing on it, she decided to put all of her attention on the movie, and thoroughly enjoyed it. Even the boys seemed to be somewhat into it.

"Ringo, I'm sorry but I think I'll have to leave you for Ariel," Dustin sighed dreamily, his chin in his hands.

"She's mine," Lucas spoke in a similar tone, eyes glued to the screen.

"Excuse me?!" She shouted, pretending to be offended. "Is it because she can dance?"

"It's because she's... *everything*."

"Screw that, I've got more moves than her," Ringo hopped up from the couch, kicking off her canvas shoes and shaking out her limbs.

"Oh god," Steve muttered to himself.

"Oh god," Nancy moaned in amusement, smacking her hand over her forehead.

"What's happening?" Jonathan asked in confusion.

By pure luck, the movie had been close to finishing and the final song was beginning, providing the perfect backdrop for Ringo to dance her heart out.

If you would call it 'dancing'.

Ringo flailed her limbs around, swinging her hips in messy circles as if she were encircling an invisible hula hoop. She pointed her fingers in the air a la disco style, and kicked her feet as if she were doing a jig.

The entire room was filled with raucous laughter, and even Steve joined in after a couple seconds of resistance.

"It's Ringo's turn to get popcorn!" Will pointed out when the debate arose about who would go up and make some more.

"Watch it, you," she narrowed her eyes teasingly at him. "I know where you live!"

Will chuckled innocently, but Ringo sat up from the ground anyway, groaning at the aches in her legs from sitting so long.

It was nearing twelve at night now, but they had no intentions of going to bed just yet. After the movie had finished, the group had gathered around and played board games, which resulted in lots of playful arguments and Ringo flipping the entire Monopoly board in frustration.

"I'll go get it, I can't stand to be around you cheating fruits any longer," she flipped her hair dramatically, lifting her legs over Lucas who blocked her path.

As she sat on the counter, aimlessly swinging her legs, waiting for the popcorn to pop on the hob, she jumped a little in surprise at the sight of Steve appearing in the doorway.

"Jesus," she muttered, clutching her hand over her chest to calm her racing heart.

"You're jumpy lately," he commented, but his expression was stony. Ringo had no choice but to acknowledge him now, he had cornered her.

"Yeah, fighting a big monster makes you a little scared of things that randomly appear," she shrugged, picking at her nail polish.

"Is that why you're avoiding me? You scared of me?" He questioned sarcastically.

"No, that's now why," she huffed, crossing her arms over her chest to hide her jittery fingers.

"Then what is it?" He copied her pose, crossing his arms and raising an eyebrow at her.

Her breathing hitched at his question, months upon months of avoiding Steve since she had left Hawkins had caught up with her and now she had no choice but to confront her actions head on.

There was a flicker of something in his eyes that caught her attention as she opened her mouth to speak. Something, *something*, had told her that Steve knew exactly what the problem was. And when she realised that, it was her that became defensive.

"I think you know why," she called him out for it, ignoring the sudden popping noises emerging from underneath the tinfoil on the cooker.

Steve was certainly surprised at her words, both the fact she had caught him out and the reassurance he got from her answer - that he

had been right.

"Wow," he spoke dumbly, at a loss for words, running his hand over his perfectly smoothed hair.

Ringo, in five words, had exposed the underlying tension that had been present in their relationship like a pestering third wheel. Now that it was exposed, it would either make or break their friendship.

Steve hadn't been blind. Ringo may have been his best friend, and he may have been dating Nancy, her *cousin* - but she was also a girl. An attractive girl, at that.

Naturally, he had been physically attracted to her from the onset. He was only human. But when he had truly gotten to know her, seen what she looked like when she laughed and when she cried, he occasionally found himself wondering '*what if*'. What if it had been Ringo who he was dating? What if it were Ringo he took on dates and tried to impress? What if it was Ringo he was falling for?

Usually to accompany that thought, an overriding sense of guilt came to wash it away. And he was right back to thinking of Nancy.

But now Ringo had confirmed that she had picked up on the tension he convinced himself was imaginary, and he was confused about how to act altogether, now.

"Does that mean our friendship is ruined?" He dared to ask, looking away from her piercing gaze.

"Well, that's up to you, I guess," she tucked her hair behind her ears, the growing foil catching her eye. Ringo promptly hopped off the counter to pull away the pan full of popcorn before a disaster could happen.

"I don't want it to be," he admitted quietly, fearing her reaction. Ringo was silent, stopping her movements momentarily before slipping popcorn off the pan and into a large bowl. When she was finished, she wiped her hands and set the pan down, turning back with a small smile.

"Good, because this whole *walking* everywhere has really been a pain

in the ass. Even if it *is* giving me a summer body," she grinned jokingly. Just like that, the Cold War between them had melted away.

Steve threw his gaze up to the sky and stepped toward the blonde, wrapping his arms tightly around her.

This time, she reciprocated.

Julia Wheeler's face was flushed from rushing when she opened the door to her apartment, her eyebrows furrowing at the unfamiliar guest.

"Uh... hello?" She greeted, quickly looking the boy once over, who fidgeted under her gaze.

"Hi, I'm Jonathan, a friend of Ringo's?" He ended in a question, cursing himself internally afterward for his lack of people skills.

"Okay," she drew out the word, clearly uncomfortable with the fact a boy was at the door asking for Ringo, but ultimately opened it wider for him to enter anyway. "She's in her bedroom."

"Oh!" She called out after Jonathan made his way down the hallway. "And keep the door open! I'm not Joseph, I'm not going to *believe* she got knocked up by God."

Jonathan reddened a dark shade, his neck heating up from the comment. He certainly saw where Ringo got her brash and upfront personality.

"Really?" Ringo shouted in reply, opening her bedroom door after hearing her mother, "you're that old I thought you'd have known her!"

Jonathan's eyes widened at her words, wondering when Ringo had become so abruptly rude to a parent.

"Very funny, I'm making broccoli just for that!" Julia retorted in amusement, prompting Jonathan to realise that it was just the banter between them, rather than outright disrespect.

"Damnit," Ringo muttered under her breath, ushering Jonathan into her room. "Come on, you almost missed it!"

They settled down into bean bags set on her bedroom floor, angled at a television. It was covered in scrapes and certainly looked secondhand, if not just well used, but Jonathan would never comment on that.

'Dallas' had become a guilty pleasure of theirs over the Summer break, a secret they shared that they'd never tell *anyone*, out of shame. But every week without fail, Jonathan and Ringo would hole up in her room to watch a new episode, enthralled by the drama of it all.

"Where's Nancy today?" Jonathan asked curiously when an ad break came on, eliciting a smirk from Ringo.

"Wouldn't you like to know," she giggled, nudging his arm with her elbow.

"What does that mean?" He answered, swallowing nervously.

"What does that mean?" She repeated, mimicking him. "You like Nancy so much you'd set yourself on fire just to keep her warm."

"T-that's- that's ridiculous! We're just friends!" He stammered immediately, face flushed and words rushed furiously.

"There is more of a chance of me marrying Kevin Bacon than there is of you *not* liking Nancy," Ringo scoffed.

"Well in that case, when's the wedding date?"

"It's *okay* if you like her, Johnny, it's natural!" He recoiled at her words and her newfound nickname for him.

"Yeah, well you're in the same boat so," he shrugged innocently, turning his attention back to the screen.

"Excuse me?" She chuckled at the absurdity of his words.

"You like Steve so much you'd sacrifice your first born to stroke his

hair," Jonathan joked, taking her off guard by both his words and his sudden confidence.

"Well!" She shouted, looking as if she was about to continue before flopping back down into her bean bag and huffing. "Fair enough."

"Woah," his eyes widened. "I didn't expect you to admit it so easily."

"Well it's not like I can do anything about it," Ringo rolled her head to the side to look at him. "Even if they broke up, it's an unspoken rule. He's off limits for life."

"It's not like he's a can of Coke that Nancy licked to claim ownership."

"Well..." Ringo waggled her eyebrows, causing him to roll his eyes and recoil in disgust at her insinuation. "It's just a little crush. Just a little one, I'll get over it."

"We'll help each other," he vowed. "No more liking people we can't have." He held his hand up for her to shake, which she did.

"Agreed," she beamed, dropping his hand but keeping her eyes on his face, even after he turned back to face the screen, a thought coming to her head. "Hey... we're still single..."

His eyebrows furrowed at her suggestive tone, eyes narrowing when she raised her eyebrows teasingly and pouted her lips.

Jonathan rolled his eyes and shoved her forehead back with his palm, unable to hold back the laughter at her attempt.

"I'd rather kiss *Steve*, Ringo."

"Oh well," she grinned, shuffling her hair back into place. "Worth a shot."

Hello again!

I actually like this chapter, it was a lot of fun to write and STINGO are friends again! They didn't interact much this chapter, but I have a jam-packed chapter coming up next time. ;)

P.S Sassy Mike is my new favourite character in this book.

Thanks everyone for reviewing and reading! 3

PondLake - Me too! You can always tell how people feel about each other by the way they react in reunions. I hope you enjoyed this chapter x

Court725 - Me neither! I am soooo excited to write Season 2 chapters. Thanks so much and have a great day x

Vince Basile Jr - You didn't have to wait too long ;)

harleyquinn87 - Loved reading your reactions to each chapter! Thank you so much for reviewing, I hope you liked this one 3

edrch - That's so heart warming to hear thank youuuu! Have a wonderful day and I hope you like what's to come x

21. Ditch Slap

"OKAY, SO THIS IS THE EMERGENCY BRAKE," Steve explained once again, having previously mentioned that object in particular a grand total of three times.

His car was his most prized possession, easily the best in the school parking lot - outside of Summer break, of course. As much as he trusted Ringo with almost anything, letting her behind the wheel of his car was not one of those things.

After whining profusely about her complete inability to drive, Steve had finally caved and agreed to teach her. After all, how bad could she have been? Perhaps the fault was with her teacher, rather than her personal ability.

So the very next day, which was a mild Thursday in August, he drove onto a thin, practically empty road that once belonged to the farm it led up to. With the farm house now empty and void of any life, it was the perfect place to allow Ringo to learn some of the basics.

"Oh? Is it? So I should just yank on this if I want to slow down?" She asked falsely innocent, eyes widened as she placed her hand over the metal stick. Steve's nervousness had completely overshadowed him, as he failed to see the joke behind her words.

"No!" He shouted worriedly, shaking his head and batting her hand away. "Never *ever* pull on this in the middle of a drive! It's an *emergency* brake!"

"Calm down, Jesus," she scoffed, flipping her hair over one shoulder and returning her hands to the wheel. "You've been spending too much time with Nancy, that's exactly what she sounded like when I told her I borrowed her bra."

"You *borrowed* her bra?" He echoed, desperately trying to push aside the rising images that came into his brain. "Isn't that gross?"

"That's what she said, but I mean, what's a bra between cousins?" Ringo shrugged carelessly. "If I borrowed Mike's panties then that's a

whole different story."

"Okay, concentrate!" He commanded, pointing at the steering wheel with a forceful glint in his eye that made Ringo want to burst out laughing. He was taking the lesson entirely too serious.

"Okay," she agreed, placing her hand on the emergency brake and lowering it finally, the car slowly beginning to roll forward. She beamed brightly at the sensation, it having been a full year since she was last driving.

The previous summer, at least once a week, her father would take her in his car to teach her to drive in dilapidated parking lots. But try as he did, Ringo was a tough cookie to crack. Her driving was once described as, "how a blind person would drive if they were also one-handed".

After the incident that led to her being sent off to Hawkins, the lessons had ceased, and when she returned before Christmas, the hostility between them was no basis for a driving lesson.

The memories that had caught up with her clouded her mind, so she quickly squeezed her eyes shut momentarily and shook her head, willing them away.

"What are you doing?!" Steve bellowed, gripping the door handle tensely, "open your eyes!"

"I was *reminiscing*!" She shouted back with a roll of her eyes. The car hadn't swayed from its original positioning on the road, nor was there any other car in the distance they could see ahead.

"Remin-" he began, before huffing and cutting himself off, "that's it. Pull over. You're clearly not ready."

"Oh, come on!" She complained. "How am I going to learn if you're not going to be patient with me?"

Steve sighed but stayed silent, watching her every movement carefully as she slowly teetered up the dirt road, giving instructions when necessary.

After a couple of minutes, the distant sound of gravel crunching met her ears and caused her eyebrows to frown in confusion. Ringo's eyes flitted up to the mirror, widening instantly at the sight of a car coming close behind them.

"Oh shit! Steve there's a car! What do I do?" She began to panic. The road wasn't nearly wide enough to pull in, and with the rate she was going, it wouldn't be long before the other driver would lose their patience.

"Crap!" He swore, checking the side mirror and then looking over his shoulder. "Just... drive faster!"

"I can't! I won't be in control of the car then!" She argued back, grip tightening on the wheel. A loud car horn ripped through the silent country air, causing her to jump in her seat.

"Just go!"

"Fine!" Ringo yelled, slamming her foot fully down on the gas pedal, not realising that Steve's car was a little more sensitive than her father's old truck.

The BMW shot off with a jolt, causing the two inside to bounce against the back of their seats. With the shock of the move, Ringo accidentally turned the wheel, causing it to veer off straight into the ditch and for the blonde to scream in surprise.

There was silence in the car for a minute, Ringo staring ahead in shame and mortification, and Steve sitting in shock and fear for what the underside of his car would look like. The vehicle was slanted from the deepness of the ditch, it would be no easy feat finding their way out of it.

Cockily, the car behind overtook within the newly freed road space, revealing an adolescent man in the front seat. He smirked in amusement at Ringo, shaking his head in judgement before speeding off at a pace all too illegal.

"I never trust guys with mullets," she murmured, trying to break the tension. Steve responded by turning his head and glaring at the side

of her face. Within seconds, she broke down.

"I'm so sorry! I told you this was a bad idea! I'm a terrible driver and I've probably ruined your car, please don't defriend me!" She begged, turning and physically clasping her hands together under her chin.

"It's... fine," he gritted out, forcing a small smile to ease her conscious.

"...you can be mad," she allowed, screwing up her expression and squeezing her eyes shut in preparation.

The look on her face was enough to dissipate his frustration, even making *himself* feel guilty for allowing her to think he'd be mad at her. After all, it wasn't Ringo's fault she had the driving capability of a preteen.

"Hey," he caught her attention, smiling gently, "it's okay. We just... need someone to help us push it out of the ditch." The softness of his tone caught her completely by surprise.

"I saw a payphone on the way here, we could call Jonathan? He doesn't live too far away."

"Yeah, okay."

To say that Steve was rather sour-looking when Jonathan arrived with Nancy would be the understatement of the year.

His grin was so forced it was as if he hadn't even tried to conceal it, lips stretched across his cheek so far all his teeth showed. Ringo was forced to play off her snort of laughter with a cough.

"Alright, Nancy you're gonna sit in the driver's side and turn the engine on. Hit the gas when the car starts to move," Steve explained as the brunette clambered inside the slanted driver's seat.

"Why can't I steer?" Ringo whined, trudging towards the rear end of the car where Jonathan and Steve were positioned.

"No offence, Ringo, but I wouldn't let you get behind the wheel again if I was dying in the back seat," Steve fake-smiled again, this time out

of pure sarcasm rather than uncomfortableness.

"Fair point," she shrugged, placing her palms against the trunk alongside the two boys'.

"I have a lot more upper body strength, just pointing that out," Nancy called out jokingly from her comfortable position inside the car, switching the engine on.

"Oh yeah? Did you get that from carrying your ego?" Ringo fired back, receiving chuckles in response.

As the engine revved, and with a prompt 'go' from Steve, the trio began to push against the trunk, using all of their strength as Nancy simultaneously pressed down on the gas.

"Keep going! Keep going! *Keep going!*" Steve pressured, with Jonathan and Ringo sharing a side-glance.

The car began to slowly inch forward, creeping its way up the slanted ditch and onto the road once more.

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" Steve was still yelling, eliciting a huff from Ringo.

"Jesus! You sound like a cheap porn actor!" She snapped, not receiving the reaction she expected when he turned his head to face her with widened eyes.

"Hey, you watch-"

Before he could finish, the BMW had finally slipped over the harsh edge of the road and back onto the flat surface. But Nancy's pressure on the accelerator caused it to shoot onward and for Ringo to fall forwards with the sudden disappearance of support.

She fell face-first into the muddy ditch, her chin smacking into the dirt and coating the entire front of her body. For a second, she couldn't react - simply staring down at the ground beneath her with an agape mouth and a sore chin.

It was the raucous laughter of Steve and Jonathan that brought her back to reality, and then she let out a loud groan of complaint.

"Fucking *hell*!" She ranted, her friends doubling over in laughter and completely incapable of helping at that moment. After settling the car onto the road, Nancy exited the driver's seat and rounded the car to inspect the commotion, her hands clapping over her mouth when she saw what it was.

"Why don't you all go shit in your hands and clap!" She raged on, pressing her hands further into the mud to push herself off the ground. Finally snapping out of their stupor, Jonathan and Steve each cupped a hand underneath each of her armpits to help haul her to her feet.

"She looks like the demogorgan," Nancy wheezed, unable to hold in her amusement any longer.

"That'd explain the big mouth," Jonathan commented, surprising them all by his forwardness. Except Ringo - who he had grown closer than ever to over previous weeks.

"Where's my axe?" Ringo grumbled as she whipped her shoulders out of their grip, taking a shaky exhale and straightening her shirt, although it was already destroyed.

Ringo Wheeler was certifiably intoxicated, that much she knew. But in her hazy state, she was so far gone she couldn't even tell how much she had to drink.

The party at Scott Parker's was, in her opinion, unmissable. It would be one of the final parties before the school year began again and their lives would be subjected to torture. Particularly for Ringo and Steve, who were entering their senior year.

Perhaps she had gotten drunker than intended to drown out the guilt in blatantly lying to her mother, by earlier telling her "Jessica's boyfriend dumped her, and a girl's night was desperately needed."

Jessica hadn't even attended the party, refusing to subject herself to it. But Jonathan, Steve and Nancy had. Jonathan was the one who drove her to Scott's house, while Steve took Nancy.

There were three stages to a drunken Ringo Wheeler:

1. Giddily giggling and frequent denials of being tipsy.
2. Dancing provocatively.
3. Throwing up and crying.

Luckily for the rest of the attendants, Ringo was in full swing of phase two, much to the boys of Hawkins High's delight as she moved her hips to the beat of the music.

Steve had lost Nancy minutes before, and stopped searching for her when he noticed Ringo was surrounded by a flurry of men in the centre of the makeshift dance floor. The mere image had set his body alight, all worries of Nancy being replaced with anger at the men who itched to put their hands on her. Steve silently dared them to.

A familiar figure caught his attention in the corner of his eye, looking over he finally found his missing in action girlfriend - who was currently deep in conversation on the couch, with Jonathan Byers. A decision that he wasn't aware he was debating with himself about had been made then, prompting him to turn back towards Ringo's direction and make his way towards her.

A sudden shift in the music as a new song began caused the blissful expression on her face to fall and morph into one of excitement and surprise, her giddy squeals filling the room as she clapped her hands and bounced on her feet.

All eyes cut over to her, watching in amusement as Ringo began to nod her head and stick her foot out, following the steps for The Safety Dance.

Of course, Steve thought, of course she'd have learned it.

She made her way through the dance with a surprising amount of skill, considering she was heavily intoxicated and in heels. Instead of becoming the laughing stock that Nancy had worriedly thought she would from across the room, Ringo had actually spurred on those around her who knew the dance to join in.

"Oh my god, Ringo," Steve barked a laugh when he finally reached her, met with a stern glare from the star herself.

"Get in formation, Harrington!" She commanded, gesturing to his feet. Never in a million years did Steve Harrington think he'd have agreed to a synchronised dance number to one of the world's cheesiest songs. But for Ringo Wheeler? He agreed immediately.

When the song reached halfway, spurred on by her newfound confidence the blonde shakily climbed on top of the coffee table to continue her dance as if she were the lead band member herself. Although the men surrounding her earlier were all but displeased, Steve was left with a rather sour expression.

He told himself over and over he wasn't jealous. Ringo wasn't his property, nor anyone's for that matter, therefore what she did with others was not anyone's business or problem. But the way their eyes lusted after when she was clearly too drunk to fully consent made Steve want punch the daylights out of all of them. Or get his nailed bat.

As the song ended, he pushed through them easily, his basketball muscles helping with that, and holding his hands up to her.

"Come on, Olivia Newton-John, lets get you home."

Ringo giggled and grasped his hands shakily, shockingly she hadn't slipped during her stunt on the table, which was a minor miracle in her state.

On his way out, he cast one last glance back to Jonathan and Nancy as they exchanged words softly, whatever worry they felt for Ringo gone now that Steve was handling it.

It would have been the mature thing to tell her he was walking Ringo home, but there was something in the comfortableness she showed while around Jonathan that saddened him. He knew the Byers boy would have given Nancy a ride home, and would probably thank God for giving him the chance to do it. It was no secret that he liked Nancy, which hadn't truly threatened him until lately, until he noticed Nancy's eyes were bright when they stared at him.

But after dropping his gaze to the blonde who's arm was wrapped securely around his waist, Steve supposed that made him a hypocrite.

hello again!

Another chapter I'm quite proud of. I want to fully show Ringo and Steve's development as well as Nancy and Jonathan's because Stancy's relationship will be quite different when I approach season 2.

Thanks to everyone who read/reviewed the previous chapter! 3

edrch - I'm so glad you think so! Steve's finally starting to get a grip, thank god!

Court725 - Adorable and hilarious is exactly what I was aiming for with that scene so this review made me so happy! I hope you liked this chapter and what's to come 3

NikkiHh - You made my day when I first read this comment so I wanna thank you so much for that! Your opinion of Ringo is the best compliment you could have given so I thank you so much and hope you have a great day x

Candy95 - Thanks! I was excited to write it! Jonathan, Ringo and Jessica will be quite a close friend group as the "not entirely unpopular but not popular" people. Can't wait to write some angsty humour over their shared feelings for both halves of Stancy ahah x

harleyquinn87 - Ahhh that's so good to hear! I hope you like what's to come and this chapter too! Have a wonderful day sweetie x

22. Jessbian

"AND THAT'S WHY I THINK THAT I WOULD KISS LUKE SKYWALKER, BUT MARRY HAN SOLO SO I COULD KISS HIM EVERY DAY," Ringo rambled on, her speech increasingly slurred. This particular debate had been going for the last ten minutes, with the blonde arguing that Han was better 'boyfriend material', despite the fact Steve had never spoke against it.

They had left the party fifteen minutes ago, and with Steve himself intoxicated and Ringo annihilated - driving home was out of the question.

She had her arm wound around his by the elbows, clutching it tightly for support as she walked along the pavement unsteadily.

"Ringo, you do know I've never even *seen* Star Wars?" He sighed, repeating himself for the third time.

"What the hell?" She gasped, just like she did the other times. "That's positively *ludicrous*. What, are you too busy sucking face with Nancy to watch a good movie?"

"First of all," he began, raising an eyebrow challengingly, "the movie was out before Nancy and I started dating. Second of all, don't be so bitter!" He ended in a sing-song voice to show he was joking.

"I'm not bitter!" She protested, ripping her arm from his to walk along by herself. "I love Nancy, okay! I even gave her my Brady Bunch lunch box in second grade because she didn't have one!"

Ringo stopped in her step, a wide smirk on her face full of mischief and amusement. Steve stopped upon noticing she wasn't following, turning to see what the problem was, but the blonde simply booped him on the nose with her finger and giggled.

"And now I'm giving her *you*," she sang, her tone and expression contradicting the rather sad statement. Steve's face fell instantly, mouth adjacent and lips moving as he tried to formulate words. But words couldn't come, as his brain wasn't even able to form thoughts.

"Ringo, I-" he began, the words he wasn't even sure of cut off by the image of the girl tipping sideways and falling straight into a shrub in someone's garden.

He wasn't sure initially whether to bark a laugh or jump to help her, instead, he settled for both. Hauling her to her feet while his booming laughter echoed down the empty street.

"Ow," she moaned tiredly, grappling for his hands as he dragged her upwards, leaves trapped in her now messy hair.

"You're a mess, Ringo," he commented, plucking stray leaves from her hair. Her left arm was red from scratches, but she didn't look too affected.

For the rest of the walk to her apartment, they stayed silent, with Ringo's arm wrapped around his again.

"*Ringo!*" Julia Wheeler hissed when she opened the door, clad only in her pyjamas and a robe. She gave her daughter a disappointed once-over, an undeniable twitch of worry in her brows upon noticing the intoxicated state she was in.

Her eyes followed up from her nearly-unconscious daughter to Steve, who was smiling awkwardly beside her.

"I suppose you came here with her thinking you were gonna *get some*," she crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes suspiciously. "Well not my daughter, hot rod. *Not* on my watch."

"O-oh! No, Mrs Wheeler!" He shook his head, face immediately reddening. "I'm Steve! Her friend! I would never- what? Not that there's anything wrong with her! I just, personally, would never!"

Her eyebrow raised as she watched him ramble and rave, until he finally stopped and sheepishly admitted, "I'm Nancy's boyfriend."

"Okay, Nancy's boyfriend," Julia smiled in amusement, stepping forward and wrapping her arm around Ringo's waist for support, grunting when almost all of her body weight was placed on her. "Thanks for taking her home."

As Steve rushed downstairs, red-faced and embarrassed, Julia led her daughter down to her bed once again.

"This has got to stop, Ringo," she muttered to her. "This is the last time."

"Can I get a strawberry milkshake please?" Ringo's grumbling voice asked, the hoarseness entertaining the trio sat in her booth at Brainshakes. The waitress gave her a look, probably wondering about the black sunglasses she was wearing inside.

"Late night, Ringo?" Jessica smirked, leaning back and crossing her arms.

"I wouldn't call it a late night," Nancy added in a smart tone, "she left before Jonathan and I did."

Jessica, Jonathan, Ringo and Nancy had agreed to meet up at Brainshakes the day after the party for lunch - or in Ringo's state, her 'hangover cure'. As neither Jonathan nor Nancy had drank, and Jessica hadn't even attended the night before, the blonde was left to suffer alone.

"You'd think she'd have worked off all that alcohol doing the Safety Dance," Jonathan joked, causing Ringo to glare at him across the table next to Nancy. Although her eyes were shaded by the dark sunglasses.

"She did the Safety Dance?" Jessica squealed in laughter almost hysterically, her hand clapping over her mouth to muffle the guffaws.

"I'm moving back to Florida," she threatened, whipping off her sunglasses as the tall glass of milkshake finally arrived, revealing the dark circles underneath her eyes.

"Oh come on," Nancy smiled as she slid her pancake stack towards her, "it could have been worse. After you left, Pamela Jenkins stripped down to her underwear."

Ringo's shame was redirected away from her, thankfully, at the sound of the bell above the door dinging. Instantly, the entirety of the

diner's customers lifted their heads nosily to spot the new entrant, looking back down before doing a swift double take.

Ringo's eyes narrowed at the sight of the man who she immediately recognised as the one who overtook her driving the day before, his ridiculous mullet and unfortunately handsome face easily recognisable. He was clad in a leather jacket and jeans, chewing on a piece of gum cockily. Everything about him screamed cliché, and made Ringo particularly uncomfortable.

When his eyes landed on the table with their group, he smirked cheekily and started to trudge towards it, causing Ringo to dart her gaze away and huff quietly. Already, she was uninterested.

"Hello ladies," he greeted, his tone unsurprisingly sultry. "Oh, you're a dude! It's hard to tell from behind." He acted surprised as he laid eyes on Jonathan, after eying up the three girls with a glint in his eye.

"Can we help you?" Nancy spoke defensively, raising an eyebrow as he rested his palm on their table.

"I don't know, can you?" He retorted, licking his lower lip. "I'm having a party at my house on Saturday before my parents move up. There'll be no furniture or anything, but there'll be beer. And hopefully sexy chicks like yourselves."

"Not interested, Michael Myers," Jessica grumbled, shoving a fry around her plate frustratedly. His attention immediately shifted to her.

"Oh come on, you and I could have a lot of fun," he raised his eyebrows suggestively, causing Jessica to form a lazy smirk of her own. She shuffled over in her seat and suddenly wrapped her arm around Ringo's shoulders.

"What can I say?" She shrugged, nodding her head towards Ringo. "You're not my type."

While Nancy and Jonathan's jaws had dropped far enough to catch flies, Ringo simply smirked and raised her brows at him.

Billy didn't seem deterred however, licking his lower lip as if this had

posed a challenge, only serving to further infuriate the girl.

"Why don't you run along and find another pole to piss on?" Ringo smiled sweetly, sensing her friends distress and standing up for her.

"If it's doggy business you want, blondie," he shrugged, dropping his eye in a wink and heading towards the counter to order, receiving four glares in his absence.

"So," Nancy began, looking entirely awkward as she fumbled over her speech, eyes following as Jessica removed her arm from Ringo. "Are you two, like, together?"

"No," they answered simultaneously, appearing confused by the question.

"She's too pale for me," Jessica teased, nudging her with her elbow.

"Uh!" Ringo scoffed, fighting back a grin of amusement. "Racist, much?"

"Oh you wanna talk racism to me?" Jessica challenged, crossing her arms over her chest as they dissolved into giggles. Their banter confused the two across the table, who stared in confusion.

"So," Nancy continued when the question she so obviously wanted the answer to wasn't addressed, "you're not with Ringo but you want to be with girls?"

"Nancy!" Jonathan hissed at her bluntness, but Jessica wasn't phased.

"I'm a lesbian, Wheeler," Jessica nodded, "it's pretty obvious. I mean - dude, please. I'm so gay my nickname in freshman year was 'Jessbian'".

"It suits you," Ringo poked her arm with a cheeky smile.

"Did you know?" Jonathan asked her.

"Nah, I don't care enough to ask people who they like," Ringo shrugged, reaching for another fry from their shared bowl.

"Speaking of people they like," Jessica whispered to her slyly, the blonde's expression twisting in confusion as she looked up at the sound of the bell, again.

Steve's eyes searched the room, breathing in relief - or panic, when he saw Ringo. More specifically, the person sitting across from Ringo.

"Hey, guys," he waved after wading his way towards them, nodding his head to each of the group. "Nancy, can we talk?"

"O-oh, sure," she nodded, looking baffled as he began to lead her towards a table in the corner far away from them.

"What do you think that's about?" Ringo asked, trying to mask her curiosity.

"Maybe they're breaking up," Jonathan suggested, throwing casual glances around the parlour so he could secretly watch them from the corner of his eye.

"Oh, you'd love that," she beamed in response.

"Says you!"

Steve Harrington wasn't always nervous. He had mulled his words over since the night before, tossing and turning in bed, feeling as if his next move was one of the most important in his current life.

He didn't take the decision lightly, it was something on his mind for quite some time. Steve may have been spoiled by his rich parents, he may have had his previous ego-centric moments, but he liked to think he wasn't particularly selfish. At least, not now.

And that is why he knew it was wrong to continue his relationship further.

In his heart, he felt guilty. Guilty that his eyes lingered on his girlfriends cousin a little longer than appropriate, guilty that there were days he'd rather spend with her, and especially guilty that even during his own break-up his eyes would flit back to the blonde a few tables away. He would never cheat on Nancy, but his heart cheated himself.

In his mind, he knew feeling guilt was pointless as he assumed Nancy was in a similar situation. The only difference was he was willing to admit to himself that he had a crush on Ringo, while Nancy was still in complete denial about Jonathan - something he imagined Nancy's vision of a perfect high school career had been the cause of.

"I..." he began, looking back and forth between the eyes of the girl he thought he could love, praying he wouldn't break her heart. "Do you think that something's different with us lately?"

Nancy was silent for a moment, causing Steve to fear the worst until she broke out a sigh of relief and nodded, leaning forward on the table.

"Yes. I've been wanting to say this to you but I didn't know how!" She gushed, causing him to exhale a breath he didn't know he was holding.

"Don't get me wrong, you're a *great* girlfriend-"

"And you're a great boyfriend!"

"But I feel like all we do is argue and get jealous and I just don't think that's what a relationship should be about," he explained.

"I agree," Nancy nodded, a sad smile on her lips. "I just... I have a lot of issues I'm trying to work through with everything at Halloween and Barb, and I think that's taking form in my jealousy of you and Ringo." He was about to speak and interrupt her, but she cut him off first. "And before you say anything, it's okay. It's okay, Steve."

Steve could have kissed her just for how understanding she was, but instead, he settled for grabbing her hand that was resting on the table.

"And what about Jonathan?" He pressed knowingly, raising an eyebrow.

"What?" She scoffed, ripping her hand away and closing up. "There's nothing between me and Jonathan. Nothing at all."

"Are you kidding? That guy would mow down anyone who looked at

you wrong. He looks at you like I look at people when they suggest we get KFC for dinner."

"So how you look at Ringo then?" She pointed out, a smile playing with the corners of her lips.

"Hey, you don't need to worry," he shook his head. "I wouldn't try to date your cousin."

"Please, I'm begging you!" She chuckled. "Take her off my hands! It's been so long since she was taken out she's starting to find *Freddy Krueger* attractive."

Steve barked a laugh at this, taking a moment when their conversation died down to reach his hand towards her, which she took confusedly and gave a small shake.

"It's been great dating you, Nancy Wheeler."

"And you, Steve Harrington."

It was the next day before Steve could see Ringo again, and the long hours had been dreadful. He was dying to discuss his break up with her, to hear her reaction and opinion. He knew he wanted to ask her out eventually, but he figured a day after his break up would be in bad taste. And Ringo deserved better than to be seen as a mere rebound.

So as he bound up the stairs to her apartment and rapped on the door quickly, he couldn't help the way his grin dimmed when it was Julia Wheeler who answered, and not Ringo.

"Hi, Mrs Wheeler," he greeted politely. "Is Ringo in?"

"Hi, *Nancy's* boyfriend," she teased with a tired smile, "Ringo's feeling a little under the weather. I think the stress of today's date was getting to her."

"Why? What's today?" He asked worriedly.

"Her father's birthday," she explained, confusing the teenager. Why

would that date have upset her? "Can I ask you something?" She stepped out and closed the door until it was only open a small crack behind her, checking if Ringo was listening before turning back.

"How is she coping with his death now? She was having a hard time in Florida, I thought being back here would help but after seeing the state she got herself in on Saturday, I'm not so sure." Her words settled in Steve's mind, accompanied by a wave of confusion.

Ringo's father was dead?

"S-she... she seems fine, I just thought drinking too much was something she did accidentally, I didn't realise?" He answered after she stared at him expectantly for an answer.

"Ringo drinks too much when she's pushing down her feelings," she sighed, scraping her hand through her hair. "She started doing it regularly after coming back from Hawkins last Christmas, I'm not sure why, but then when *he* died it increased tenfold. I don't know what I'm supposed to do with her."

"Don't worry, Mrs Wheeler," Steve assured, hiding his shock. "I'll take better care of her."

When they said their goodbyes, Steve left feeling deflated. All essence of excitement was gone and was replaced by worry, and a degrading feeling of stupidity.

He thought they were close and knew each other well, but perhaps Ringo didn't trust anyone at all.

Hello, everyone!

This chapter is a little important, because this is where Ringo and Steve's relationship is about to shift dynamic. They won't just jump at each other immediately because of the Steve and Nancy break up, because at the end of the day Ringo will still respect her cousin too much to do that. I hope everyone was okay with how their break up went down, it was obviously quite different from the show but I'm also aware of how the break up in the show made everyone hate

Nancy a little for technically cheating on Steve. I just think after Nancy's season one development, she wouldn't just break Steve's heart and that they'd be a little mature about it, especially since Steve was at the end of season two.

This chapter also shows the underlying issues Ringo is facing, the stress of the Halloween before, followed by hating herself for liking her cousin's boyfriend and her father dying without making amends with her is taking its toll and instead of relying on others she's using alcohol to drown it out.

PS If anyone wants a song that just SCREAMS Stingo, listen to Fast Car by Tracy Chapman x

PPS Thanks to everyone who read and/or reviewed the previous chapter, it means the world 3

edrch - Thanks so much! 3 Oh trust me, Ringo won't be taking any of Billy's shit especially when her friends are involved!

harleyquinn87- No, thank YOU! Me too! It's hard to believe season two was a whole ass year ago, thank god i have this fic to keep me distracted while we wait ahah x

Vince Basile Jr - That is SUCH A COMPLIMENT WOW. I'm freaking out over that, I truly didn't and still don't think this was all that special so it blows my mind when people say that! I just love the OC I've written and it's really therapeutic to write this story. Thank you as always x

candy95 - I hope you liked this chapter 3

Court725 - So glad to hear that! I reallllly didn't want to rush onto season two when it comes to character development, because when season 2 comes around there'll be so much happening it'll be hard to hash the characters out so i'm doing it now! Have a wonderful day x

23. Hold My Beer

"RED IS SO YOUR COLOUR," Nancy commented from across the bedroom, tilting her head to the side as she watched her cousin flick mascara onto her eyelashes.

"You think so?" Ringo beamed, snapping the wand back into the tube and turning to Nancy, smoothing her hands over her red dress. "Green looks so much better on you though!"

"Don't start with me, you look amazing," Nancy rolled her eyes playfully, sitting on the bed as she waited for her to get ready.

"Fuck naw! You're cute as hell!" Ringo argued, placing her hand on her hip and raising an eyebrow.

"I told you not to start with me, you beautiful brat!" She stood up from the bed.

"Ohhh! You're so pretty! Noooooo, you're so pretty!" A mocking voice sounded from the doorway, the door having opened a crack to reveal an unimpressed Mike Wheeler. "Will you two get over yourselves? Moms complaining that the living room reeks of teenage boy."

"Get lost, you little asshole!" Nancy huffed, marching over and shoving his head back through the door, closing it swiftly behind her. She blew her hair out of her face as she leaned back against the door, smile dimming. "Hey.. I have to go to Barb's parents house tomorrow for dinner. Usually I'd go with Steve but, well, you know..."

"What do you mean?" Ringo asked confusedly, tilting her head to the side.

"I'm talking about Steve and I breaking up," she commented casually.

If Ringo had a drink in hand, she was sure it would be spat out across the floor.

"W-WHAT?" She spoke in a strangled sounding voice, composing herself to look calmer than she really was.

"Didn't he tell you?" Nancy's eyebrows furrowed.

"No," she shook her head, managing to dull her expression down to the widening of her eyes. "But... why?"

"It just wasn't working out, it was pretty mutual," she shrugged with a soft smile, "but anyways. Will you come with me tomorrow?"

"Nancy, of course I will," Ringo walked to her, wrapping her arm around the girl for a quick reassuring hug.

Despite her exterior, inside she was freaking out at the news. But of course, it didn't change things - not really. Steve was still Nancy's ex, their relationship was still relevant and that in turn, left him untouchable.

Nancy and Ringo finally walked down the stairs towards their friends waiting in the hallway, but as they rounded the corner they realised their audience now extended to Mike's friends too.

They were waiting in a straight line, with Jonathan, Steve, Dustin and Lucas standing, watching the girls with eager eyes. Mike and Will stood at the end out of obligation, far less interested in the girls than the others.

As if on cue, Bust a Move by Young MC began to play on the radio as the girls trailed downstairs, practically moving in slow motion and revelling in the reactions they received.

Nancy looked amazing to be sure, and Jonathan couldn't help but stare, but Steve's gaze, as always, drifted to the blond behind her. Lucas and Dustin smirked wildly, teenage hormones getting the better of them, while Mike rolled his eyes.

"Okay, come on!" The Wheeler boy shouted. "Neither of you are Queen Elizabeth! Get a move on!"

Jonathan was the designated driver for the night, therefore the group would be taking his car. It shocked Ringo that Nancy and Steve were still travelling together, perhaps their breakup had been truly amicable, after all. It was probably the reason Nancy darted to get to the passenger seat before Ringo could, and the blonde allowed it,

given the circumstances.

"I don't understand why we're going to this asshole's party," Ringo ranted from the back seat, Jonathan throwing his free hand in the air to show that he agreed.

"Hey, it's a party, right?" Steve beamed, grabbing one of the cans of beer he left by his feet and popping open the tab. For the courage to get through this party, Ringo bent over and grabbed one as well, failing to notice the way Steve eyed her up.

He hated being the one who would have to tell her to stop tonight, but something about Ringo told him that no one had ever told her when she was drinking too much. For she was too young to realise her limits herself yet.

So even if she hated him for a night, Steve decided he'd allow her to get buzzed before he'd step in. And even then, he hoped he'd only have to distract her enough so she wouldn't want to get another drink, instead of outright telling her what to do.

"He makes one move, I'm kicking his ass," Ringo threatened, being careful not to spill beer on either her dress or Jonathan's car seats.

"If he makes one move, *I'll* kick his ass," Steve added.

"Jessica isn't coming again?" Nancy turned around in her seat to ask Ringo, receiving a shake of a head in response.

"She said, and I quote, 'I'd rather die of a diarrhoea than go near Billy Hargrove.'"

"Jesus," Jonathan grimaced.

As much of a drag as his personality was, Ringo couldn't help but admit - at least to herself, he threw one kickass party. Despite not a semblance of furniture in the house, save for a lone fridge, a boom box and a few kegs of beer, the atmosphere was lively.

The men in the group had made it their mission to steer the girls away from Billy, at their own request. So whenever the boy caught

their eye, Steve or Jonathan would swoop in and drag either girl to the kitchen for 'another drink'.

The saviour and the saved this time was Jonathan and Nancy, who darted out to the back yard when they caught Billy giving her a once over. Ringo couldn't help but chuckle into her cup, being only her third beer so far that night.

"He's like a freakin' predator we have to actively escape from," she giggled, leaning against one of now-empty kegs as a sort of seat.

"He reminds me of that movie *Alien*," Steve offered, causing the blond to snort laughing. "Just a big ol' head, dribbling everywhere and looking for anyone he can bury himself inside of."

"That's disgusting!" She howled with laughter, smacking her hand playfully against his chest. When their conversation cooled to a comfortable silence, an earlier revelation sprang to Ringo's mind, and it was the perfect time to mention it.

"So," she started, swinging her legs against the keg casually and taking another sip. "Nancy told me you guys split up."

His eyes widened immediately, playing off the surprise by taking an overly long gulp of his beer before he could reply.

"Yeah, like, last week," he shrugged.

"Why didn't you tell me?" She pressed, hoping her chipper tone masked how offended she was by the withholding of their break up. Doubts began to fill her mind since Nancy had told her - had Steve kept it a secret in case it would encourage her affections?

"I swung by your house last week," he revealed, appearing embarrassed. "Your mom told me you were sick and it just... it didn't feel like the right time. And every other time I've seen you since then you've been with the rest of the guys, and I didn't wanna blurt out in front of Nancy, 'hey Ringo! Me and Nancy called it quits! Catch me a train to Splitsville!'"

She laughed at his booming voice, her insecurities momentarily quieting for the reminder of her painful weekend to take over. It

wasn't often Ringo was too overcome by her emotions that she couldn't even leave her bedroom, but when it did happen, the emotions of that time would leave her with a rather deflated mood for the rest of the week.

"You're okay, right?" He asked, raising his brows with concern. There was something in his voice that had her convinced he *knew*, but she didn't dare acknowledge it.

"Yeah, I'm okay," she smiled softly, lifting the hand that wasn't holding her cup to nudge her fist against his shoulder.

Ringo had consumed just enough alcohol to leave her with a happy, buzzed sensation. And Steve intended to keep it that way.

The second she finished off her plastic cup, he knocked the empty holder from her hand and dragged her to the dance floor. His positively *obscene* dance moves weren't something he liked to practice in public. But for Ringo, he'd make an exception.

Thankfully, she didn't realise he was distracting her, so when *Take On Me* by A-Ha came on, he began to swing her in circles.

Their dancing was absolutely ridiculous, flailing their limbs in every direction with Steve occasionally grabbing her hand to spin her around on the spot. But her bright laughter was music to his ears, so he didn't care who wanted to watch.

Nancy and Jonathan watched comfortably from the sidelines, thankful that the attention wasn't on them - something that made both of them anxious.

The latter of the two had heard of their break up, and couldn't help the soaring sensation that picked up his heart rate when he had. He tried to watch his friends dance, but all he could think about was how Ringo looked absolutely *alive* dancing with Steve. Jonathan was sure he had never seen her smile brighter, and that was just being friends with Steve.

He could imagine he had a similar look whenever he would glance at Nancy. Ringo had wanted Steve, and he had wanted Nancy - they

split up, and he couldn't ignore the inkling of hope building that everything was falling into place.

Jonathan chanced a glance at Nancy, checking to see if she watched the scene with envy. He was pleasantly surprised to see that she looked rather serene, not at all affected as she had been weeks prior. It startled him so much when she spoke again, he realised that he forgot to look away after staring at her for the first time.

"How long do you think it'll take them to get together?" She mused, with a cheeky smile.

"I- o-oh, oh I don't know. I don't think-" he stammered, redirecting his gaze back to Ringo and Steve.

"Save it, I know *you* know that Ringo likes Steve," she smirked at him knowingly, causing his cheeks to blush. What else did she know? "I wonder how long it will take."

"I don't think it'll happen," he started again after clearing his throat, "Ringo respects you too much."

Nancy narrowed her eyes confusedly, never having taken into account that Ringo would be reluctant about it.

"Lets go get them a drink," she turned and headed into the kitchen, filling two cups from the keg and handing them to Jonathan, before filling another two and keeping them in her own hands.

When they trailed back into the living room, Nancy made eye contact with Ringo and nodded her head to gesture for them to come over.

The blonde smiled and rushed towards her cousin, Steve following suit. The easy smile that had lingered on his lips faltered when he saw Nancy hand Ringo another red cup, hoping that all of his efforts weren't for nothing.

They stood for a minute, casually commenting on the party and sipping beer before they were interrupted by the party's host.

"So, you guys came," he wrapped either arm around both Ringo and Nancy's shoulders, causing their expressions to screw up in disgust

and wiggle out of his reach.

"Yeah," Ringo grunted as she moved away, forcing a fake smile, "nice party!"

"Glad you could come!" He eyed her tight-fitting dress, causing Steve to tense beside her, trying to remind himself that his cup was plastic and would be destroyed if he squished it. "Shame your friend couldn't come though."

"Hey, man," Ringo's facade dropped with her smile, turning entirely serious. A look they didn't often see on the blonde. "Jess is a lesbian. She's not interested, alright?"

"Alright," he held his hands in the air, a cheeky glint in his eye that spelled trouble. "Even though, between you and me, you know what they say about lesbians."

The four of them stood up straight immediately, preparing to give him a reaction if he dared to say something derogatory to follow.

"And what's that?" Ringo asked through gritted teeth.

"They just haven't met a guy who can fuck them good."

Their reactions were not instantaneous, in fact, the only one to even appear as if they heard him was Ringo- who's lips stretched into a tight grin. The rest of the group were too frozen in surprise, absorbing that he truly was *that much* of an asshole.

"Steve?" She turned, voice sugar sweet. "Can you hold my beer? My hands sore."

"Sure?" He agreed in confusion, taking her cup in his free hand. "What's wrong with your-"

Before he could finish his question, little Ringo Wheeler, who barely met Steve Harrington's shoulder, shot her little fist forward and connected it with Billy's nose. It was a move he had seen her do before, but only when she was *royally* pissed off.

He stumbled back, hands dropping his bottle of beer to fly up and

clutch his bleeding nose. Without waiting for his response, Ringo turned swiftly and flew towards the door, steam practically blowing from her ears.

"Asshole," Nancy insulted him, placing her cup down and following after Ringo.

"Fucking loser," Jonathan added, following after Nancy.

That left Steve, who felt that Ringo had enough of a response for the four of them put together. He couldn't help but smile, with pride and with satisfaction that he had gotten what he deserved. From a girl, no less.

"Something funny, Harrington?" Billy threatened, dropping his hand to reveal the small trickle of blood from his nostril.

"Yeah, your whole persona, *Hargrove*," Steve erupted into chuckles, shaking his head in amusement before dropping both cups, the contents spilling all over the ground. "Stay away from my friends, or else we're gonna have a problem."

Steve jogged to catch up with the group, just as they were walking towards Jonathan's car, throwing an arm over Ringo's shoulders.

"Ringo, that was *amazing*," he gushed, smiling from ear to ear.

"He got what he deserved," Nancy added, a small satisfactory smirk on her lips.

"I've told you all that just cos I'm small doesn't mean I'm not deadly," she beamed, flipping her hair over her shoulder. "He knew better than to fuck with my best friend."

"Black Mamba over here!" Steve howled, tickling her sides and reducing her to a giggling mess, the four of them clambering into Jonathan's car and calling it an early night.

Julia Wheeler went to sleep with a smile on her face that night, because for the first time in a long time, Ringo came home from a party, sober and radiating happiness.

Ugh I know it's weird to love your own OCs but GODDAMN IT I LOVE RINGO. AND STEVE. AND NANCY AND JESSICA AND JONATHAN. I'm really proud of this chapter and I hope everyone likes it and likes the direction I'm taking this book in.

I'm pretty sure this is the last in-between chapter, meaning I'm about to dive right in to Season 2. I'm a lot happier with the characters now that I've taken a while to hash them out further, there was nooo way I could have gone straight to the next season after the end of the first one.

Thanks so much for everyone's continued support it means the absolute world to me x

edrch - I love reading your reactions to what happens in the chapters! I completely agree, I hated Nancy a little in the show after she broke Steve's poor lil heart so this is the more mature way to go, and I can keep her and Ringo's friendship alive and focus on making Stingo a thing ;) thank you so much, until next time! x

DarkLordOfMemes - This made me laugh so much I went into my "meet my OCS" book on my Wattpad page and added a thread of the Slow Ride cast as vines to ringo's section

4plywhenicry - awwww thank you so so much! I can't believe you read through the whole thing! I hope you continue to read and enjoy it, have a lovely day 3

Judging. All day every day - I can't believe you binged it too! Here's a little update for ya, i try to update once a week because honestly I'm obsessed with Ringo and Steve, as narcissistic as that sounds haha, thanks for commenting! x

candy95 - thank you so much! I'm glad you liked it! It's always kinda iffy messing with the canon in case people don't like it but now I'm glad I did! x

Vince Basile Jr - this review makes me so happy you had no idea! Thank you so so much! As for Steve and Ringo, I'll go with "soon" ;) thanks for leaving a comment I hope you have a lovely day and that you liked this chapter x

Court725 - completely agree! I was very much Team Steve after that, I just felt like that was really detrimental to her character and I want to further develop all the characters in my book, Nancy is one in particular because I'm hoping to redeem her ahah. Thanks as always for your support, it really means the world x

24. Nightmare on Hawkins Street

"SO WE'RE GOING DRESSED AS MYSTERY INC. FOR HALLOWEEN," Ringo announced suddenly, breaking Steve's concentration with the road ahead. He gave her an incredulous glance.

"Who is?"

"Me, you, Nancy, Jonathan and hopefully Jessica," she nodded. She hadn't actually *told* the others that she had planned out their costumes, but her powers of persuasion were not to be underestimated.

"No way," he laughed, "I'm not dressing up for Halloween, we're seventeen, Ringo."

"And what? The mystery inc. were an iconic essence of our childhood, and now you wanna shit all over their memory by refusing to be Fred?"

"Fred?" He chuckled again, his eyes glancing around the school parking lot to find a space. "I'm definitely Shaggy, no doubt."

"No, Jonathan is Shaggy," she refuted, a frown forming on her face. "Don't fuck with my order, Fred."

"Why would Jonathan be Shaggy? That makes no sense."

"Because he's like the cool guy who should be as popular as Fred is but isn't, plus I can definitely see him smoking dope in his room with a dog," she explained. The idea had struck her the night before, seeing as the gang couldn't dress up the Halloween before - she wanted to fulfil their legacy this year.

"And have the others agreed to this?" He questioned, switching the engine off after driving into an available spot.

"No, but they will."

"How are you so sure they'd agree?"

"Would *you* wanna listen to me complain from here until Halloween?" She raised an eyebrow, causing him to grimace.

"Point taken," he smiled sheepishly, reaching into the backseat and rifling around until he unveiled some sheets of paper. "Listen... will you do me a favour?"

"What is it?" She enquired, eyeing the sheets.

"I wrote a college application essay, and... I just wanna make sure it's okay. Will you take a look over it?" He asked nervously, causing her heart to swell from how positively *cute* he looked.

"Aw, Fre- Steve!" She gushed, nodding her head and taking the papers gently. "Of course, I will!"

The car was silent as her eyes skimmed down the pages, narrowing in on grammatical mistakes and moments of rambling. She forced her smile to stay present however, not wanting to hurt his feelings when he had so obviously trusted her.

When she reached the last page, he began to bite his nails, nervously fidgeting around until he couldn't take it any more.

"It's crap, I know," he commented, shrugging his shoulders.

"It's not crap, shut up," she rolled her eyes, reading the last paragraph although she had already formed an opinion of his paper. It *was* crap. But they were going to fix it.

"It's not good," he said uncaringly, but she knew it bothered him.

"It's just simple stuff we need to fix, this is like a first draft right?"

"Yeah, try *twenty*-first draft."

"The only dumb thing here is asking me to correct this, like I'm stupid as shit, Steve," she giggled, flipping back to the first page to point out stuff she noticed.

"You're not dumb, quit it," he shoved her shoulder gently, a small smile on his lips as he leaned over to see what she was pointing out.

"You know how here in the first paragraph you talk about the basketball game?" When he nodded, she continued, "and then you go on to talk about your grandads experiences in the war... I just want to know how that's, like- the same thing?"

"It connects because... you know, we both won," he explained, his expression entirely serious. Whether it was his face or his comment that got her, Ringo dissolved into laughter instantly.

"I-I'm sorry!" She apologised in the middle of hysterics, bringing the sheets up to her face to hide it.

"I knew it was crap!" He rolled his eyes and leaned back in his chair, fighting off the grin of amusement forming at her cackling. "I'm just gonna start again."

"No, no!" She shook her head, wiping underneath her eyes when she finally calmed down. "It's good, honestly, you just needed someone to beta write it, I think. When's the deadline?"

"Tomorrow," he wiped his hands over his face, entirely stressed out.

"What the hell?" She hissed, eyes widened. "They're *already* taking college applications?! I thought that shit was in like... March!"

"No?" He screwed up his face. "It's this semester, Ringo."

"Damn," she sighed, handing the sheets back over to him. "I guess it doesn't matter anyway."

"What do you mean? Aren't you going to college?"

"No," she forced a chuckle, entirely fake. "We'd never be able to afford college in my lifetime. I think I'm just gonna get a job and help support my mom."

"Oh..." he said dumbly, feeling saddened by her situation. Sometimes he took for granted the luxuries on offer to him - money being the main one.

"Anyways, we can fix this. Do you want me to come over tonight?" She offered.

"Yeah, but I thought we were going to the movies tonight too," he groaned, throwing his head back against the head rest.

"You can crap your pants at Freddy Krueger tomorrow, lets sort out your life tonight first."

It was silent for a moment as she handed the paper back to him, causing him to sigh sadly.

"If it makes you feel better, I probably won't be going to college either," he admitted.

"What do you mean?" She furrowed her brows. "You obviously want to go."

"I'm being realistic, I'll probably just end up working for my dad anyway," he shook his head, the earlier banter and happy tone between them dropped. Ringo reached out for his elbow, squeezing it comfortingly.

"I think you should do what you want to do, Steve Harrington. But if you do move away for college, I'm going to visit so much you'll never get the chance to bring girls home," she waggled her brows, smiling cheekily, entirely unaware that Steve wasn't even thinking of girls other than her.

"It might not be such a bad thing, it's got like insurance and benefits. All that adult stuff."

"Gross." Her comment had his saddened expression breaking into laughter once again.

"Gross indeed."

Just as they began to exit the car, Billy drove into the parking space directly opposite theirs, the ginger girl that was supposedly his sister rushing out of the car embarrassedly. Ringo smirked, clearly the enhanced revving of his car wasn't something she was a fan of either.

"Looking fine as always, Wheeler!" Billy shouted after getting out of the car, giving her a quick once over.

"Mhm! Don't make me break that nose again!" She called back, giving a little wave with her fingers.

Steve rounded the car and wrapped his arm around the blonde's shoulders protectively, chuckling at her words and leading her inside.

"Hey, Wheeler!" A boy called out, catching her attention away from the books she was shuffling into her locker. She turned around, but instead of conversation he merely handed a red paper flyer to her and jetted off, selectively handing out flyers to specific people.

Ringo shook her head in amusement as her eyes glanced down the flyer, which was quite literally an advertisement for a Halloween party at some jock's house. Now that she thought about it, it had been quite a while since she was at a party. Every Friday was spent with their "Wheeler Family Friday" tradition, which had somehow extended to Jonathan, Steve, Jessica and Mike's friends.

Any time she had suggested going to parties at the weekend, Steve was quick to shut her down, immediately claiming he had wanted to go to the movies or do something else non-extreme.

"Don't tell me you're actually considering going," she immediately recognised Jessica's voice and tone appearing beside her, feeling her friend read the flyer over her shoulder.

"Yes, as a matter of fact I am and you are too!" Ringo smiled sweetly, slipping the sheet into her locker and closing the door.

"You're basically dragging me to Hell, you realise that, don't you? Satan?" Jessica rolled her eyes, leaning against the locker next to hers.

"But I have our Halloween costumes planned! We're going as Mystery Inc!" Ringo spurred excitedly, almost jitteriness on the spot.

"What fresh Hell is this?" She muttered. "Which one would I even be?"

"Scooby Doo?" Ringo offered.

"Sure, make the only black girl the dog!" Jessica scoffed teasingly, her

gaze shifting to something over Ringo's shoulder.

"Boo!" Steve roared into her ear, grabbing her sides at the same time to ensure Ringo was squeaking with surprise.

She whirled around on the spot, glaring fiercely at a beaming Steve Harrington who was still wearing his sunglasses, despite being inside.

"Do that again and I'll have your balls kicked back inside you," she threatened, but his grin only widened further.

"He'd have to have balls for that to happen," Jessica added.

"Hey! Hey!" He interrupted them, hands in the air in defence. "Leave my balls out of this, okay?"

"What balls?" Jessica and Ringo asked simultaneously, turning to each other afterward and breaking into laughter, knocking their hands together in a high five.

Steve and Ringo had only spent an hour trying to reword his college application, but upon numerous breakdowns and failures, he had tossed his pen down and decided to continue with the original plan in going to the movies.

A ten minute drive later, and they were waiting in line to buy tickets for *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, a movie Ringo had already seen and loved.

"You know," she tried to caution him, "this shit is uber scary. I don't know if you'll be able to handle it."

"Oh right," he dropped his voice lower to avoid anyone around hearing, "because that big ass monster I knocked the shit out of last Halloween was so less hard to handle."

"Well," she started, tilting her head to the side, "you did run away for like five minutes."

"And I came back, for you," he replied smartly, flicking her head with his forefinger and thumb. "So be grateful."

There were times he said things like this and Ringo would be praying to a god above that they lived in an alternate dimension. She was usually a brutally honest person, so withholding her feelings from the friend she had grown true feelings for was getting increasingly difficult with each passing day.

She found herself imagining often what it would be like to date Steve Harrington. Ringo didn't like to draw on her memories of his relationship with Nancy as an example, because theirs was rather lacklustre compared to the chemistry she had imagined would be between them.

Perhaps one day, ten years from now when Nancy had completely forgotten about her high school boyfriend, she would ask her permission and tell Steve how she felt. Then they would get into his car and drive off into the sunset, while singing 'You're the One That I Want'.

Or maybe that was just Grease.

"Why aren't you focusing on the movie?" He interrupted her thoughts, a couple of minutes into the beginning. Steve was absolutely gripped already, shovelling handfuls of popcorn into his mouth at a rapid rate. "Is it because you seen it already? I told you we didn't have to see it, it's okay-"

"No, no," she interrupted, "I wanted to see it again. Just got lost in my thoughts there for a minute."

"Care to share," he whispered, cocking an eyebrow curiously. She was suddenly thankful they were in the very top row of seats, and that the theatre wasn't overly full.

"No, no," she disputed, "nothing important at all."

The movie continued, and Steve had taken to jumping slightly at particularly scary moments, something she found absolutely endearing.

"Scared?" She teased.

"No," he huffed. Seemingly jinxing himself, he jumped again two

seconds later, and Ringo had to cover her mouth to hold back howls of laughter at the comical scene.

Steve was gripping the box of popcorn in one hand, his drink in the other, so when he would jump everything would move. His popcorn would shuffle in the container, the ice cubes in the drink would slush together and his hair would wave around.

She bit her lip to contain her laughter as she remembered a scene that was coming up soon, and sure enough, Steve jumped again, this time hurling the entirety of his popcorn through the air until it landed - half on Ringo, half on the floor.

She couldn't hold it in this time, the laughter emitting from her ripping across the silent theatre and disturbing the atmosphere completely. The other attendants whirled around to glare, but she only laughed harder as Steve stared at his now empty box in confusion.

"You two!" A clerk shone a flashlight on them from the aisle, pointing towards the exit with his thumb. "Out!"

Ringo was still laughing as they walked back to the car, and eventually Steve joined in out of contagiousness. His eyes were fixed on the side of her face, admiring the way her eyes crinkled when she laughed too hard and how she'd grip her stomach and throw her head back.

He had waited weeks now to tell her how he felt, and still it didn't feel like the right time. It never did with Ringo, when the risk of ruining their friendship was there. But Steve was never one to put friendship over possibility, and if Ringo *had* returned his feelings and they started something, that would be well worth the risk. In his opinion.

Deciding he simply couldn't hold back any more, but not wanting to scare her with his words, Steve reached out and grabbed her hand. His grip halted her until her body was forced to turn and look at him, confusion clear on her face.

"What's up? You alright?" She questioned curiously, causing his heart

to swell even further.

Now, he could put his sequence into motion.

Steve Harrington had a five-step foolproof guide to kissing a girl successfully.

Rule Number One: Eye contact, which elicits sexual tension every time.

Rule Number Two: Contact, placing your hands somewhere on their body - usually their arms.

Rule Number Three: The slip and slide, where he would slip his hands up from her arms to cup her cheeks and shuffle forward until they were closer.

Rule Number Four: The lean in, but always allowing them to close the final distance.

Rule Number Five: *Kiss her.*

The steps had proved successful once again, but its impact was far more important than any other random girl. This was *Ringo*, his best friend. The girl he truly liked. Kissing her now would either make or break them.

He saw her breathing hitch as he moved closer, her heart hammering in her chest. Ringo had imagined this moment many times, but there was something rather jarring about a situation suddenly becoming reality. Especially a situation you had dreamed for.

Steve had leaned in until they were so close their breathing mingled, only adding to the rising tension between them. She knew he was waiting for her to finish the build up and kiss him, but to do that - she'd have to ignore the voice in her head that told her this made it *her* fault. *Her* betrayal.

But for the first time, she decided to ignore it. Placing her hands on his chest, Ringo closed the minuscule gap and placed her lips onto his, fulfilling a dream she had imagined for almost a year now.

His lips were soft, and as cliché as it sounded, fit well with hers. She found herself clutching his shirt tighter, never wanting to come up for air and let go of him.

Steve was entirely blissed out, she was just as perfect as he had imagined. It didn't matter whether it happened in the street after getting kicked out of a theatre or underneath a canopy of stars at a picnic. The fact was - *it happened*.

The moment ended prematurely for both of them, with Ringo being the one to lean back, her mind swimming and cheeks flushed. Steve used his hold on her cheeks to lift her head up.

"Are you alright?" He asked, already thinking about kissing her again. Now that he knew what it felt like, it only fed his appetite instead of quenching it.

"Yeah," she nodded, far too quickly. He had to stop himself from sighing as he watched her retreat into herself, her hands dropping to cross her arms over her chest as she stood back and headed back in the direction of the car.

Ringo Wheeler was not easy to handle, Steve knew this well. Now he also knew that she shared his feelings. However that knowledge made things so much more painful when she turned cold after their kiss. But Steve was fully aware of the reasoning behind it.

And to solve that, he'd have to talk to Nancy.

BOOM DID IT. AHA. NO REGRETS.

A little Captain Holt reference there if anyone's seen B99.

They finally kissed! I just realised this was their first kiss in the book after 24 chapters I should have called it Slow Burn instead of Slow Ride

So glad to finally be getting into the swing of season 2, I hope everyone likes what's to come!

harleyquinn87 - aren't they adorable? I'm obsessed with them and

I'm the one writing it ahah, there'll obviously be slight differences to the plot with the introduction of ringo but I hope it'll be good! x

candy95 - He 100% would, I actually had planned for Ringo to end up hitting him before I even started writing this book so I was excited for that ahah

Vince Basile Jr- There's so many compliments in your comment my head is spinning thank you so so much! I still can't believe people react so positively to this book, but I'm especially glad that people like the OC as she's my favourite character I've written in any of my books. I kinda want her to exist and be my best friend ahaha. Thanks so much and I hope you liked this chapter!

Lost Girl 02 - Completely agree with the OC thing, sometimes they're a bit boring to read because sometimes they don't really impact the plot much and just add a line or two of dialogue to the canon story which is just not interesting whatsoever. So I'm so so happy to hear that you don't think Ringo falls into that trope! Right! I can't believe its been a whole ass year since Stranger Things 2 how have I coped?

hopevandyme - That means the world to me honestly! It's difficult writing OCs that are interesting when everyone reads for canon characters so that's such a compliment thank you so much! x

Guest - LMAO I LOVE RINGO TOO

edrch - Literally can't tell if I want to be Ringo, have her as a best friend or marry her. Thank you so much! I hope you liked this chapter 3

NothingNooneZero - It's absolutely mind blowing to me that people find this book interesting enough to re-read! It's a dream come true so thank YOU from the bottom of my heart! I hope you have an amazing day x

25. Bullshit

"I'M SO SORRY I DIDN'T GET TO COOK," Marsha apologised profusely, probably for the fourth time, as she placed down the bucket of KFC on the table. "I was gonna make that baked ziti you two like so much, but I just forgot about the time. And before I knew it, oh my god it's five o'clock."

"It's fine!" Nancy assured with a kind smile, while Ringo nodded her head and reached for a chicken leg.

"It's great!" She beamed as she messily took a bite of the breaded chicken, "if it didn't make my chin break out like a World War I would eat KFC every day."

The Holland parents smiled politely, chuckling in amusement at the blonde's words. They seemed to be in much better spirits than usual today, which made the dinner itself ten times more bearable.

"So," Nancy began, pushing her food with her fork. "I noticed a 'For Sale' sign in your yard. Is that the neighbours, or...?"

The two shared a look, Marsha visibly excited at the news she was about to share as she set her drink down and leaned in.

"We hired a man named Murray Bauman," she explained. "He was an investigative journalist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*."

"He's pretty well known," her husband fished out a card from his pocket to hand to Ringo, who was slowly setting down her half-eaten chicken as she realised what they were insinuating.

"Anyway, he's freelance now and he agreed to take the case."

Ringo slyly handed the card to Nancy and used the interaction to make eye contact with her, their glance speaking volumes.

"Um," Nancy hummed, swallowing harshly as a lump began in her throat. "What exactly does that mean?"

"Means he's gonna do what that lazy son of a bitch Jim Hop... sorry."

What the *Hawkins Police* haven't been capable of doing. It means we have a real detective on the case."

Ringo reached for her coke and brought it to her lips, silently wishing it was somehow laced with vodka as she proceeded to down the whole thing out of nervousness.

"We're going to find our Barb," Marsha added, a light in her eyes that broke Nancy's heart.

"He already has leads, by God, he's worth every penny."

Every word they spoke weighed heavier on the two girls, but perhaps so much more so on Nancy. Ringo attended these dinners to support her, after all. As much as she sympathised for Barb, she hadn't even really known the girl well enough to be as crushed by her disappearance as Nancy was.

The girl next to her dropped her gaze to her hands, leaving her cousin worried.

"So you're... selling your house to pay for him?" Ringo deduced, sighing softly in pity.

"Oh don't worry about us, sweetie. We're fine. More than fine. For the first time, in a long time, we're hopeful."

Her words were the breaking point for Nancy, who began to stammer a quick apology and stood up from the table to dart off towards the bathroom. Ringo's eyes followed her until she was out of sight, anxiously chewing her lip as she thought of how upset she would be about this revelation.

While the town slowly began to forget about Barbara Holland, Nancy's guilt only exceeded tenfold as the anniversary approached.

"Is she alright?" Barb's father pressed, chewing into a breast.

"Oh yeah," Ringo waved off, shaking her head. "She just gets upset when the topic of Barb is brought up."

"They were such good friends," Marsha remarked sadly, nodding her

head ever so slightly.

"Funny joke now that you mention KFC," Ringo falsely laughed, trying desperately to avert the attention away from Nancy's reaction. "Why did the rooster go to KFC?"

She continued when they didn't answer, "because he wanted to see the chicken strip."

Instead of laughing, they visibly stiffened in discomfort from her joke, leaving Ringo chuckling even harder out of embarrassment. Face bright red and the urge to run away overcoming her, she stood up and pointed to the bathroom.

"Just gonna go... check... ya know."

Nancy had left the door unlocked, thankfully, she was only using the bathroom to escape from the dinner as Ringo had burst in unannounced. The teen closed the door after her, furrowing her brows in worry as she spotted her cousin seated at the edge of the bathtub, crying into her hands.

"Nancy?" She asked tentatively, approaching her slowly, "are you okay?"

All she could manage through her sobs was a shake of her head, a signal enough for Ringo to plop down beside her and wrap an arm around her tightly.

"I know, I know," she murmured comfortingly, rocking them from side to side gently.

"It's all my fault, they're gonna lose their *house* because we can't tell them," she spoke between heaves of breathing, cheeks soaked with tears.

"I know," Ringo whispered. "But there's nothing we can do... we signed a contract, Nancy. And who knows, maybe this guy will find out and we won't have to be the one to tell them?"

Nancy stiffened, making her concerned that she had said the wrong thing. Clearly, she had, as Nancy shuffled away from her hold and

stood up swiftly. The brunette swiped her cheeks and adjusted her sweater, trying to appear as presentable as she could.

"Are you okay?" Ringo prompted, eyes focusing on her face.

"Fine," she responded in a clipped voice, indicating the exact opposite. But before she could ask further, Nancy walked swiftly out of the bathroom and returned to the table, as if nothing had happened.

It had been two days since Steve Harrington had seen Ringo Wheeler.

Two days since they had shared their first kiss.

Two days since he had last spoken to her.

It wasn't from lack of trying, he had called the Wheeler residence multiple times and each time only received an answer from her mother. Of course Julia grew frustrated eventually, and threatened if he didn't stop calling that she'd get a dog and train it to attack him on sight.

Like mother, like daughter.

It was now the day of Halloween, and the party they had intended on going to fell that night. Unaware if they were still attending as a group or not at all, Steve sought out the one person who would sort the situation out - Nancy.

He found her in the school library, where he expected to find her as he knew she had a free period at this time. He crossed the room quickly when he spotted her sharpening her pencil, but his determination quickly flipped to concern when he began to notice she didn't *stop* sharpening it.

She appeared to be in a daze of some sort, staring off into the distance and forgetting where she was. Steve called her name repeatedly, and brought her back to reality by gripping her arm when she didn't answer.

"Are you alright?" He asked immediately, head tilting in concern.

Nancy didn't answer right away, which was enough for him to use his grip to steer her into an empty study room that was close by them.

Just because they weren't dating, didn't mean he didn't still care for her. Nor did it mean that he wasn't able to tell when something was bothering her.

"What is it? What's wrong?" He demanded in a soft tone, waiting patiently for her to open up.

"I just... I can't keep doing this," she admitted, shaking her head in defeat.

"Doing what?" He pressed.

"Pretending like everything's okay..." Nancy confessed, taking him by surprise. He wondered briefly if her feelings had something to do with him, but she followed after with an explanation. "Barbara... It's like everyone forgot. It's like nobody cares except her parents. And now they're selling their house to pay for a PI and they're going to spend the rest of their lives looking for her. It's destroying them."

"I know, I know, okay?" He tried to calm her, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. "I get it. But listen... I'm sorry Nance, there's nothing you can do about it."

"I can tell them the truth," she persisted.

"You know we're not allowed to do that."

"We don't have to tell them everything!" She continued, desperate for at least *one* person to take her side on this.

"Nancy, they could put you in jail. Okay? Or worse, they could destroy your family. We shouldn't even be talking about this, they can do anything to us. Just think about what you're saying, please."

She shook her head quietly, holding back the building tears in her eyes and trying to keep it together in front of Steve. He didn't understand, nor did Ringo. They never would.

"Look... let's just go to Tina's party tonight, wear the costumes Ringo

is forcing us into and just pretend that we're stupid teenagers who don't have to go through shit like this, okay?"

Nancy looked at him incredulously, finding it hard to believe that he was genuinely mentioning a party while she was confessing how she truly felt.

But she agreed anyway, pushing down her emotions like she always did.

"Oh, Mike!" Ringo gushed as he opened the front door, a dry expression on his face as always. "You're absolutely adorable. Look at you with your portable vacuum cleaner."

"Portable vacuum cleaner?" He echoed in offence. "This is why you need to watch movies that we suggest on Friday nights, maybe then you wouldn't fit the blonde stereotype so well."

"I was *joking*," she glared at him, shoving his head lightly with her hand as she stepped inside the hallway. "I hope that thing didn't suck out the last essence of your personality."

"Ringo!" Dustin exclaimed, hopping off the couch he was seated on, wearing an almost identical costume. "Daphne from *Scooby Doo*? Dope costume. You really suit her."

"Thanks, Dustin!" She beamed, tucking the hair from her ginger wig behind her ears.

They had agreed to meet at Nancy's house so they could leave together, with a similar plan having seemingly been set up for Mike and his trick-or-treat escapades.

"Hey," Nancy greeted, her tone cooler than usual as she left the kitchen, donned in an orange jumper and skirt.

"Hey, Velma," Ringo replied excitedly, practically bouncing with happiness. Halloween was her favourite time of the year, after all, and costumes were her favourite aspect of it.

"Jessica and Steve are already here," Nancy pointed behind her with

her thumb, and sure enough, the two appeared thereafter.

"There's my good girl!" Ringo called sarcastically when she saw Jessica, who was dressed in a Great Dane Dog costume and wearing the sourest expression she had ever seen on the girl.

She clapped her hands on her knees and whistled at her, only pissing off her friend even further.

"Bite me, bitch," Jessica spat, not realising that Karen was directly behind her and that her eyes had widened to the size of saucers at her language.

"She's not trained yet," Ringo smirked and waved at Karen, "so are we just waiting for Johnny?"

"He said he might meet us there," Nancy explained, grabbing her coat and preparing to leave.

"*Might?*" Ringo repeated, rolling her eyes. "If Jessica The Hermit Richards can come out, Johnny boy can come out."

"Keep going, I'll snatch that cheap ass wig from your scalp," Jessica bantered in return, heading towards the front door and straight for Steve's car.

"Hey, Fred!" Ringo smiled brightly, her attitude confusing him entirely. She was acting as if nothing had happened, which he supposed was better than ignoring him. He'd be lying if he said it didn't hurt to see her avoid the subject, but he figured having a small dose of Ringo was better than no dose at all.

"Uh, hey Ringo," he waved awkwardly, half running to the driver's seat. Unfortunately for him, the rest of the cars occupants had become accustomed to the blonde taking the passenger seat, and left it free for her to sit in.

"You know what I think, guys," Ringo slurred her words, waving her cup through the air.

It was safe to say the blonde was more than tipsy, as Steve's usual techniques he employed to keep the girl from drinking too much

weren't working that nights She refused every offer to dance with him and continuously sipped on her drink, staying quiet when he tried to talk.

It didn't help that Nancy was reaching oblivion as well, their increased intoxication a result of egging each other on. Steve had his hands full with the two of them, especially considering Nancy didn't often drink, Jonathan had yet to arrive and Jessica was flirting with a random girl by the kitchen.

"I think that you're my *bestest* friends. Like, you guys are like the Fallopian tube to my ovary, you know?" She rambled, her eyes glazed over.

"That's really nice," Steve commented, full of sarcasm.

"Or the sack to my testicles-"

"Oh wow," Nancy hummed, nose crinkled in disgust. Her drunk speech was interrupted by two of the biggest assholes (in Ringo's opinion) in Hawkins approaching the group - Tommy and Billy.

Both of them were bad enough as individuals, but together? They were unbearable.

"We got ourselves a new Keg King, Harrington," Tommy boasted, slapping his hands against Billy's leather-clad shoulders. Steve looked rather peeved by the situation, straightening up and standing in a face off with Billy, the two sizing each other up.

"Wow, I'm crushed," he drawled, breathing a chuckle. Nancy rolled her eyes in annoyance, and boredom, turning to leave their small group and headed towards the kitchen area.

"You know I heard a lot about this King Steve when I arrived," Billy announced, his voice louder than normal so everyone in the near vicinity could hear. "I've been here a couple weeks now, gotta say I'm disappointed!"

Tommy was grinning eagerly beside him, happy to see *someone* was willing to put Steve in his place. The two's friendship hadn't mended properly since the previous Halloween, and the more Steve hung out

with Ringo and co., the less respect Tommy held for him.

"Is that why your face is always red, Tommy?" Ringo tilted her head, her happy-go-lucky mood fading quickly to defensive. "It's shoved five feet up Hargrove's ass?"

"Watch it, Wheeler," he threatened, visibly insulted and taking a step forward. Steve followed suit and angled his body in front of Ringo, ready to protect her if needs be.

"Oooooooo," she rolled her eyes, twiddling her fingers in the air and screwing up her expression. "I'm positively *shaking*."

With a giggle at how pathetic she considered them to be, she hooked her arm around Steve's elbow and half-dragged/half-led him away from them.

"I swear," he stared to rant, hitting his left fist into his right palm. "All I need is one swing."

"No offence, sweetie," she cooed, patting him on the cheek with her free hand. "Even Jonathan laid you on your ass."

There was a moment afterward where her hand lingered on his cheek, eyes making contact with his as they stopped dead in the middle of the living room. He froze, not wanting her to pull away, because if her gaze and intensity were anything to believe she was about to kiss him again.

Movement behind Steve caught her eye, and that was all it took to break their moment, Ringo pulling her hand abruptly away as if she had been burned.

The quiet longing she held for him for *months* had increased tenfold since he kissed her. All she could think about was his lips, what they felt like, how much she wanted to do it again. He was a great kisser, no doubt about it, but there was a certain emotion to this kiss that Ringo never felt before. It was the night previously she had realised what it was - and the answer was, she actually *liked* Steve.

Any guy she had been with previously - her feelings felt forced, they had kissed her out of pure lust, because she was *pretty*. And Ringo

had kissed them back because she felt as if she had to.

But Steve was different. He always had been different.

The blonde teenager made a beeline for her cousin just as she filled her cup up from the punch bowl, with Steve sighing audibly as he noticed how quickly she began to sink the contents.

"Woah! Woah! Woah! Take it easy, Nance," he demanded, holding his hand out to stop her. Ringo didn't move to stop her, she was just as drunk as Nancy was, and the second she moved out of the way she was about to do the same thing.

"Why?" Nancy bit back, full of attitude. "We're just being stupid teenagers for the night. Wasn't that the deal?"

"What's going on?" Ringo demanded, but neither of them answered her. Nancy proceeded to drink another half a cup and left then, leaving Ringo confused and Steve apparently guilty.

His change in demeanour made her antsy, a thousand insecurities screaming through her head - did Nancy and Steve get back together?

Deciding that she didn't necessarily want to be around him right now, she swiftly turned around and made her way towards Jessica, who was still talking to a dark haired girl, as she had for the past hour.

"Jessie," she groaned, leaning against the girl's side and resting her cheek against her costume-covered shoulder.

"Woah," the girl dropped her conversation to turn to her friend, "what's wrong?"

"I hate feelings," she murmured childishly, pouring her lips for effect.

"You hate my feelings too apparently, you little cockblock," Jessica chuckled jokingly, wrapping an arm around her and giving her a small hug.

"Oh! I'm sorry!" She stood up straight, mouth falling in surprise as she realised her interrupting, guilt flooding through her.

Before Jessica could tell her it was a joke, that she was always more than welcome to interrupt anything when her feelings were involved, Ringo darted off again.

She was actively avoiding *the* conversation with Steve, despite knowing full well that he wanted to have it. It wasn't more so that she was scared of him, she was scared of how much feeling she had poured into that kiss.

Ringo Wheeler liked Steve Harrington. Accepting it didn't help, nor did avoiding him. And kissing him until she was breathless certainly *did not* help either.

Whether it was newfound optimism, or the alcohol, Ringo had a rather outlandish idea of telling the very person she *didn't* want to find out. Perhaps if Nancy knew about her feelings, she would approve of a relationship and ease some of her guilty conscience. And then pigs would fly.

So when the girl next passed by her, sporting a newfound red stain on her orange sweater, Ringo promptly followed her into the bathroom and shut the door behind them.

Nancy had gotten wasted since she last saw her, while Ringo was still merely tipsy.

"What do you want?" The brunette grumbled, trying to wet a cloth with her fumbling hands.

"I'm gonna help you," she answered, lightly pushing her to the side and wetting the cloth thoroughly. Ringo turned to Nancy and reached for the end of her sweater and started to vigorously scrub it.

"Nancy, it's not coming off," she sighed, dropping the towel into the sink after her hand started to cramp.

"Just give me that," she snapped, words slurred but forceful none the less as she reached for the towel and tried to clean the stain herself.

"Um, Nancy can we talk about something?" Ringo started, breath hitching nervously in her chest. Nancy never answered her, but it was now, while she was intoxicated and brave, or never. "Steve and I...

kissed."

Her reaction wasn't exactly expected, having finally realised through her hazy vision that the stain was *not* going to come off, Nancy threw the towel forcefully at the sink, leaning her hands against the counter.

"I know he's your ex, and Nancy I'm so so sorry, really I am. It won't happen again, I just had to tell you... because- well, I actually... fucking hell. I *like* him. I really fucking like that dork, but I *love* you. You're my family, and I don't want to jeopardise that," she took a deep breath after she finished her ramble, out of breath from how quickly she was talking. She squeezed her eyes shut and mentally prepared for Nancy's reaction.

"You're telling me this like I don't freaking *know*," Nancy grumbled. "Everybody knows you like Steve, you're not subtle."

"W-what?" She stuttered, taken aback by Nancy's harsh tone and words. It confused her entirely, sure she knew that Nancy would be mad, but they had never actually insulted each other before in their lifetimes.

"It's all bullshit, Ringo," she continued on, and the blonde realised she made a grave mistake telling Nancy this in her current state. "I don't give a *crap* what you do with Steve, you two are freakin' perfect for each other, just like everything you do is perfect. Perfect little Ringo Wheeler with her perfect *hair* and her *confidence*."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Ringo demanded, bristling at the girl who was obviously about to start an argument with her.

"You're bullshit. You pretend like everything is okay, like we didn't kill Barb. Or like your dad isn't dead," her words broke something within her, and for the first time in months, Ringo's eyes watered as the tell tale signs of incoming tears appeared.

If it were anyone else in the world, Ringo would pull a Ringo, and fight them on the spot, threatening to shove an obscenity of things up their ass. But this was Nancy. Her best friend and her family, turning against her. There was nothing to argue with her about, she may

have been drunkenly insulting her, but she wasn't wrong. She was bullshit.

Planning to leave before anyone could see her, Ringo dashed out of the bathroom at a jog, almost running straight into Steve who was waiting patiently outside of the bathroom.

"Ringo?" He demanded in concern. "Are you okay? What happened?" But she simply shoved his hands off from her biceps and ran straight through the party, not caring for the looks she received. She only hoped that she was fast enough so nobody saw her tears.

Steve followed after her, as he always did. Luckily for him, he ran into Jonathan on the path toward the exit.

"Hey!" He called, grabbing Jonathan's attention away from a girl he had been talking to. "Can you go and sort Nancy out please? I've got to get Ringo!"

Not waiting to hear a response, he ran straight in the direction Ringo had set off in.

Hello hello! This chapter was a little Nancy-Centric, but that's purely so people can better understand why she went off at Ringo at the end. Unfortunately it was her who got the bullshit speech instead of Steve, as I didn't feel it'd make that much sense with them having broke up, but the night isn't over yet ;)

I hope everyone liked this chapter 3

Court725 - FINALLY RIGHT? Thank you so much!

firstofhername - Ahhhh thank you! x

candy95 - I'm surprised you thought it was early after how many chapters it's been, but I hope you were okay with it anyway!x

Vince Basile Jr - It definitely didn't go down as easy post-kiss as I'm sure everyone would like but patience leads to good things ;) thanks so much for your kind comments I hope you have a wonderful day x

harleyquinn87 - WELL... your wish is my command ;) haha I hope you liked this chapter sweetie! x

26. Line Dancing

"DON'T STEVE!" Ringo Wheeler shouted through her sobs, angrily whipping the tears on her cheeks away with her fingers, before shoving her hands back underneath her armpits. Any semblance of intoxication had disappeared, and unfortunately with that, she was no longer protected from the bitterly cold winds outside.

Steve had raced after the blonde, thanking God he was an athlete or else he'd have been breathless by now. He shouted her name after seeing her, but by her reaction he gauged she didn't want to be comforted. None the less, he wouldn't leave her alone, outside at night.

"Come on," he pleaded, catching up to her side and frowning upon seeing her teary eyes and red cheeks. He *hated* seeing Ringo cry. She wasn't a person who looked embarrassing when she sobbed, more heart breaking.

"No!" She grumbled, her voice thick with emotion. "Go back to Nancy, I'll be fine."

"Hey, none of that," he spoke with a sigh, gripping her arm lightly and tugging her to the side, which effectively stopped her walk. Despite her resistance, Steve stepped forward and wrapped his arms around her tightly.

She struggled against him for a few moments, sobs ripping from her throat before finally giving in and leaning into his touch. Ringo gripped onto Steve like a life jacket in the sea.

"What happened?" He asked in a soft tone, one of his hands soothingly rubbing her back.

"She's such a bitch, she doesn't know fucking *anything*," the blonde complained, voice muffled against his sweater. Her red-haired Daphne wig had been displaced previously, leaving her own hair on show, tied in a high bun.

"Don't say that," he hushed, "she's your family. You love each other."

"She didn't *act* as if she loved me tonight," her words slurred from crying, balling up his sweater in her fists. "She had the audacity to say that I'm 'oh so perfect'. Nancy's the one with the big house and the loving family, she's never had to worry about money, or whether or not they loved her. She doesn't get glared at when she walks down the hall. She even got the greatest guy to fall in love with her, and she didn't even feel the same."

Steve's eyebrows furrowed as she reached the end of her rant, more specifically the 'greatest guy' she was referring to.

"Wait a second, what-" he started to question, leaning back from the hug to look her in the eye.

"She actually brought up my dead dad. Can you believe that?" She started to chuckle, her emotions so heightened she barely sure of what she was saying any more. "Yeah, my dad's dead. The one who hated me for having naked photos of myself impermissibly posted all over school. He died a few months ago. But *I'm* the one with the perfect life?"

Steve stayed silent, merely offering himself as a shoulder to cry on, which was the only thing Ringo needed. There was no advice he could give her, he knew her too well for that. If he had suggested talking to Nancy, or tried to defend her and blame the alcohol, Ringo would surely flip on *him*.

"She literally had you wrapped around her little finger and she gave it up," Ringo's crying stopped, leaving a hoarse voice and damp cheeks in its wake.

Steve was sure his expression looked like a dead fish, wide beady eyes and gaping mouth. He couldn't quite believe what Ringo was saying, hoping she would continue but not wanting to take advantage of her clearly weakened state.

"Yeah, secret's out," she rolled her eyes, forcing a chuckle and letting go of him. "Little Ringo Wheeler has a big old crush on Steve Harrington. You can go ahead and let me down now, because I've already prepared for you to."

He was absolutely speechless, eyes raking her expression for any sign of deceit or humour. But he could find nothing - surely she couldn't have been telling the truth?

Steve had always liked to entertain the idea in his mind that, secretly, Ringo was as crazy about him as he was about her. That their friendship was only something to ease the appetite he had for her.

"You crazy girl," he finally murmured, shaking his head as a grin overtook his face. Ringo mistook his words, and swiftly turned away to march home before he could see her beginning to cry again.

Realising this, Steve shot his hand out and clasped it around hers, using the surprise of it to twirl her back to facing him. Before she could realise what was going on, he leaned down and pressed his lips to hers.

Ringo was damned sure her heart had just missed a beat or two. She could have been having a heart attack, for all she cared. All that mattered was the fact that Steve, maybe possibly potentially, felt the same.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, rolling onto her tip toes so he wouldn't have to lean down so far. A random thought had come to her head as she moved her lips against his, the tip of his tongue poking out to brush against her lower lip.

Ringo was *really* glad she had a nose to breathe out of as well. Because she never planned to come up for air.

As cliché as it sounded, it felt as if his lips were made exactly to mould against her own. But she supposed, they were rather cliché themselves, weren't they?

When finally they broke apart, they kept their faces close together - breath intermingling and nose brushing against each other's. She could practically feel Steve's mouth lift into a grin, so contagious that her own followed. It was as if from one kiss, he had ripped away her dark thoughts and soothed her aching mind.

For now, at least.

"Wait," she gasped, breaking apart from Steve as if she had been electrocuted.

"What?" He pressed, eyes wide with worry.

"Nancy! I just kissed Nancy's ex-boyfriend!" Ringo panicked, running her hand anxiously over her hair and stopping when she remembered it was tied up. "Again!"

"Yes, you did," he smirked breathlessly, wrapping an arm around her back and dragging her forward to kiss her again. Ringo melted into his touch once more, hand coming up to cup his cheek.

They continued kissing for another minute, but it was Ringo to break apart again.

"What if she hates me for this?"

"Then we'll just tell her," he grinned, not a care in the world for anything other than the girl in front of him. "Together."

"No," she refused quickly, eyes downcast. "I'm not talking to her."

"That's fine, then," he shrugged, leaning in again. She pressed her hands against his chest, abruptly pushing him back. Steve opened one eyelid, inspecting her with a frown.

"No more kissing until I talk to Nancy!" She explained, the corners of her lips lifting in amusement as she turned around and started to walk again, leaving a wanting and needy Steve behind.

"But you-" he stammered, already longing to touch her again - to feel her body against his. "You said you *weren't* going to talk to her."

He sighed softly but followed after her immediately, wrapping his closest and around her shoulder and bringing her in close.

Suddenly she wasn't so cold any more.

Saturday afternoon was in full swing, and Steve Harrington was on Ringo Wheeler's bed.

She was seated on her beanbag, of course, flicking through a magazine. Often, she would flick her gaze upward just to make sure the image was real, for the sight was one she never thought she would see.

Steve had arrived a half hour before to hang out, and it was a pleasant surprise to find that there was no awkward air between them. He merely sat on her bed, twiddling a rubix cube in his hands she had placed on her nightstand.

"Sorry I didn't go last night," he mentioned suddenly, directing his gaze from the frustrating cube towards her.

"Go where?" She replied confusedly, tossing the magazine to the side.

"Wheeler Family Friday?" He raised his eyebrows. Her confused expression falling and causing her to shake her head with a dry chuckle.

"I didn't go."

Steve sat up at the revelation, since the tradition had been established in the Summer the Wheeler kids had made a pact to never miss one.

"I didn't really wanna see Nancy," she shrugged in explanation.

"You two still haven't spoken?" He asked sensitively. It had been two days since Tina's party, and he guessed that wasn't long enough for Ringo to get over her qualms with her cousin.

"She hasn't called to apologise, and it's not like I'm gonna chase her."

"Maybe she doesn't remember?" Steve offered, but Ringo didn't answer. He decided to lighten the mood. "Well hurry up and tell her, I have to sit on my hands to keep them off of you."

She let out a quick snort of laughter, causing him to beam at the sound. Steve clambered off of her cot bed, shuffling towards the storage bin in the corner where he knew her vinyls were kept.

However upon reaching it, his eyebrows furrowed when he saw that

it was completely empty.

"Hey," he called to get her attention, "did you move your vinyls?"

"Oh," she responded quietly, her cheeks tinting red as she swallowed harshly. "No, I sold them..."

"What? Why?"

"My mom... um.. she had a little trouble paying rent last week. Ryan Peterson in sophomore year said he's give me two hundred bucks for the lot of them so." Her revelation came quite embarrassing for her, especially when it was admitted to someone who was rather *well off*.

"Ringo," he sighed sadly, crossing back to plop himself into the beanbag beside her. "If you ever need money, you know you can always ask m-"

"Don't finish that sentence," she halted him, her finger in the air. Rather than look touched, it appeared to offend her. "We don't take charity."

"Alright," he nodded understandingly. "Did you really get rid of all of them?"

"Yeah.." she sighed, suddenly interested in picking at her nails - a classic sign Ringo was embarrassed and/or nervous.

"Even the *Rumours* album?" He questioned, shuffling sideways to wrap an arm around her shoulder when she looked as if she were about to cry.

"Yeah," she admitted, "I'm so sorry, Steve. I know you bought me that album, and how rude it was to sell it. Please don't be mad..."

"I'm not mad," he denied quickly, frowning that she was so worried he would have been. He pulled her sideways until she was closer, giving her a quick squeeze. "I promise. I completely understand, you don't need to apologise. I'm just *sad*, you spent half your life searching for that album."

"I know," she agreed quietly, resting her cheek against his shoulder.

The moment fell into a comfortable silence, that didn't last long. As Julia Wheeler, unannounced as always and unaware of Steve's presence, burst into her daughter's bedroom.

Her neutral expression quickly fell to suspicious, eyes zeroing in like a magnifying glass when she saw how his arm wrapped around her. Julia raised her eyebrows, clicking her tongue.

"What's this now? Did you and Nancy swap partners like line dancing?" She teased, leaning against the doorframe and crossing her arms over her chest. Her words and stance made Steve abruptly move his arm away, albeit reluctantly.

"Mom," Ringo whined dramatically, clapping a hand over her face.

"All I'm saying is I thought he was with Nancy!" She held her arms in the air in defence, backing out of the room with wide eyes. "Sheesh, can't ask a kid anything."

On her way back down the hall, she made sure to shout over her shoulder as a reminder.

"Keep that door open! I'm too young to be a grandmother!"

"Steve?"

A feminine voice interrupted his basketball game, one that had suddenly become extremely intense as Billy Hargrove took no prisoners on the court. It wasn't even the voice of the girl he wanted to hear.

Steve nodded at Nancy, but she was not here to exchange pleasantries.

"Can I talk to you?" She asked briskly, her tone suggesting she had a problem. A chorus of "ooooh" sounded out from the men on the court, which Steve playfully rolled his eyes at.

Grabbing his towel from the bleachers, he followed after the small brunette until they reached a secluded area outside. When she was satisfied with the area she chosen, she whirled around, jaw set.

"What the hell Steve? Not only do you and Ringo not show up on Friday, neither of you can pick up a phone?" She demanded, crossing her arms over her chest crossly. "I was *worried*."

"I, personally," he began as he rubbed his towel around his neck, collecting sweat, "was just busy. Ringo however has a *very* good reason to ignore you."

"Are you serious?" She scoffed, eyes wide. Steve wondered if she were truly this heartless, but it became increasingly obvious that Nancy didn't recall what happened. "What did I do?"

"You really don't remember?" He asked in fascination, shaking his head. "Jesus, you really can't hold your drink."

"Spit it out, Steve!"

"So you don't remember having a conversation with her in the bathroom? The way you told her she was fake and everything about her was bullshit, because her dad died so she wasn't perfect?"

Nancy didn't reply immediately, eyes wide and breaking eye contact out of shame. Her last recollection of the night was spilling punch on herself, followed by brief flashes of the inside of a car.

"Oh my god," she mumbled, suddenly - it had all made sense. And it was entirely her fault.

"You know what I think, Nancy?" Steve started, anger building inside when the image of Ringo crying crossed his mind. "I think *you're* bullshit. I think that you're the one who pretends everything's perfect, but really you're just sweeping everything under a carpet and hoping the dirt doesn't pile up."

Nancy was speechless at his words, the guilt taking over again. The first wave over Barb, the next over Ringo.

"I gotta go," he shrugged upon hearing his name called, not sparing her another glance.

Nancy leaned against the brick wall, breathing hitching as she worried about her cousin and their relationship.

Potential mistakes in this chapter, I was so tired proofreading this my head kept dropping! A slightly calmer and shorter chapter than the previous one to keep a good pace, but finally Stingo is going somewhere! They haven't had the "talk" yet, which will come pending Nancy's approval (or disapproval? ;))

Thanks to everyone who reviewed or even read the previous chapter! x

Court725 - Thank you so much! I hate when they argue as well, I really love their little friendship group and their bond in general. But things will work themselves out ;) x

harleyquinn87 - I'm so glad you did! I was worried people wouldn't like that twist because it was supposed to be Steve receiving it but I just felt it made more sense with the current events in this story! Thanks for reviewing 3

candy95 - awww I'm so happy you said that! I agree, it wouldn't have made sense at all if she just randomly snapped at Ringo and I wanted to show how her emotions are building up until they just break, thank you so much! I hope you have a wonderful day x

Vince Basile Jr - Not exactly the talk persay, but Ringo still admitted her feelingssss. Nothing's ever fine and dandy in Hawkins of course! I hope you liked this chapter and what's to come!

Kelly - Awww! This review made me so happy! I'm so glad you react positively to Ringo, I completely agree about the majority of OCs not offering much to the plot and I wanted to avoid that as much as possible. As for carrying on after season 2, I don't THINK so right now apart from a couple of chapters that follow up the ending of the finale but I won't rule out the possibility of doing a sequel book for season 3! And wow I completely agree with that song, it's very stingo-y haha, thank you so much for your kind review! x

- there's no greater compliment than to hear people love your

OC! Thank you from the bottom of my heart for reading this story and I hope you continue to like it 3

27. Our Thing

"**LADY AND GENTLEMAN,**" Steve began as he approached their usual lunch table, which now only held a population of two - Jessica and Jonathan. "We have a problem."

"I knew Ringo and Nancy's absence was your doing, Harrington," Jessica hissed the second he sat down, reaching out and whacking him on the bicep. "What did you do to my girls?"

"Lay off, damn!" He reached up to grab onto his arm, as if she had hit him harsh enough to cause pain. "It wasn't me, they had an argument at the party last Thursday."

"Nancy was in a bad way when I took her home," Jonathan explained, "I doubt she even remembers."

"What did they fall out about?" Jessica pressed, appearing concerned for her friends. Although she couldn't deny that she felt a little excluded at the same time, for everyone in their small group had heard of this event by now, except for her.

"It's, uh..." Steve trailed off, eyes widening to himself as he realised he would have to lie or face the Wheeler wrath, "I have no idea."

"They'll be fine," Jonathan shrugged, not understanding the situation. "They always have little arguments, they'll figure it out."

"Yeah, well seeing as I dated one cousin and *intend* to date the other I think it's safe to say I know them both enough to know this fight is different," Steve insisted, running his hand over his quaff of hair and being careful not to touch it.

Jonathan choked on the sandwich he was in the midst of scoffing down, face reddening as he threw it down onto the table and started to hammer at his chest. Jessica simply smirked, shaking her head in amusement at him.

"Fucking white people, man," she chuckled to herself, reaching for the other uneaten half of Jonathan's sandwich. "Next you'll be wanting to

date Nancy's mom."

"First of all," he held his finger in the air, narrowing his eyes at the smirking girl, "that's gross."

"Hey," she held her hands in the air in defence, "I've known you liked our little Ringo for months now. It made listening to her pine over you extremely unbearable."

"Okay, you know what-" he started, his words hitching when he realised what she said, "wait, Ringo pines about me?"

"Priorities!" She snapped her fingers in his face, keeping the sandwich suspended in her other hand.

"Right, yeah! Okay!" He forced his attention back to the topic at hand. "They're both stubborn as heck. Neither one will go to the other, so we have to force them together."

"How?" Jonathan hoarsely forced out, after finally having stopped coughing.

"You bring Nancy to your place, and I'll bring Ringo," he shrugged.

"Why my place?"

"I don't think Nancy would come to mine right now..." he trailed off, ignoring Jonathan's suspicious gaze in favour of feeling guilty.

"Can I be come or is this another thing I'm not included in?" Jessica commented offhandedly, her eyes fixed on her sandwich. Her tone suggested she was kidding, but Jonathan and Steve knew her better than that.

"Oh, come on, Jessie," Steve cooed like she were a child, sharing a concerned glance with Jonathan. He wrapped his arm around her shoulders securely, ruffling the top of her hair with his free hand. "You're way too good for this friend group, you know that."

"Oh, get off!" She rolled her eyes, shoving Steve's chest until he fell backward, unable to stop the smallest of smiles forming on her lips. As much as she acted otherwise, she truly loved the friends she had,

despite having all come from different social backgrounds. They got on like a house on fire.

She sincerely hoped they'd still be friends regardless of Ringo and Nancy's quarrel.

"I have to say, I'm surprised you're bringing me to Jonathan's," Ringo spoke out of the blue, turning to look at Steve. His fingers flexed around the steering wheel, something she didn't fail to overlook, before he let out an awkward half-laugh.

"Why would you say that?"

"Because you don't like Jonathan," she giggled, her feet tucked up so her knees were against her chest. If it were anyone else, Steve wouldn't have allowed them to put their feet on his car seats. But for Ringo? He'd make an exception.

"*What?*" He answered, a little too quick with a voice a little too high. "I so, totally, like Jonathan! That stuff before was in the past!"

"Jonathan's a nice guy," she continued, knowingly, "you sure you aren't still jealous that he wants Nancy?"

"Jealous?" He raised an eyebrow in amusement, looking swiftly back between her and the road. "Why, would that make *you* jealous?"

"As if," she scoffed, settling her feet down and turning to look out the window, arms across her chest. "You're gross, I don't even like you."

"A little birdie told me differently," he said in a sing song voice, reaching out his hand to tickle his fingers against her side.

"Who said that?" She asked in with a dark tone, attempting to sound threatening but coming off as more humorous than anything else.

"Your bestie," he sang again, prompting her cheeks to flush dark red.

"She's trying to wind you up," Ringo diverted, "because the only time I even mention your name is to complain!"

"Whatever you say," he innocently held his hand against his chest, lips lifted in a wide grin.

"Anyways," she changed the subject, rubbing her cheeks slyly in the hopes of ridding the colour. "Why did he want us over?"

"Said something about a birthday plan, I don't know," he shrugged. Ringo was suspicious, and he fully knew it. But she stayed silent none the less.

She would soon find out after entering Jonathan's front door to find a short brunette in the living room.

On cue, as if it were a western stand off, the two girls froze - eyes fixed on each other and not daring to make a movement. They stayed like this for a few prolonged seconds, neither willing to speak first. In the end, it was Ringo who broke their staring contest when she whirled around and prepared to leave.

"Hey! Hey! Hey!" Steve protested, closing the door shut behind him and gripping her by the biceps, preventing her from leaving.

"Guys, come on," Jonathan sighed exasperatedly, standing up from the couch and moving between the two, who were currently avoiding looking at each other. "Sort your shit out."

With his words of wisdom, and a brief glance between the two boys, the cousins were left to their own devices in the living room. Perhaps stubbornness was a Wheeler trait, for neither wanted to be the one to break first.

Ringo moved to sit in the couch adjacent to Nancy's armchair, crossing her legs over one another and finding great interest in the ceiling above. She reminded herself of the time when the room was covered with fairy lights, for a practice other than celebrating the holidays.

Nancy was nervous. She didn't fully recollect what she had said to Ringo the night of Tina's Halloween party, but she could gather it must have been serious. It wasn't often the two fell out, but Nancy didn't know what to apologise *for*.

"I think..." she started anyway, picking at a thread in her sweater. "I think I might have said something to you. Something I didn't mean. But I don't... I don't really remember..."

Ringo nodded, her lips curled in awkwardly. "You just said that I pretend my dad isn't dead, and that I'm bullshit."

Nancy's mouth widened into an O-shape, ready to stumble apologies from her lips but it was Ringo who visibly relaxed before she got the chance.

"It's okay," the blonde reassured her, "you were right. I do pretend that he doesn't... didn't... exist. It's my way of coping, and it's not helping, to be honest." Her voice cracked towards the end, and that ended their quarrel.

Nancy nearly dived towards the couch to be next to her, wrapping her arms around her shoulders from the side as she saw tears build in her cousins eyes.

"I'm so sorry, you know I didn't mean it!" Nancy murmured against the top of her head.

"No, you were right," Ringo refuted. "I just can't help it. It's easier to pretend I never had a dad than it is to accept that he's gone."

"Did you two ever," she hesitated before asking, "ever get the chance to make up..? Before..."

"No," Ringo shook her head. "My mom apologised for reacting to that thing last year in school, and told me she should have taken my side at first. But my dad just... didn't. It took him weeks to even want to see me when I moved back down. I think he thought that I had, I don't know, ruined my prospects? It was only after a conversation with my mom that I realised why he was truly mad."

"And why was that?"

"Well, you know we grew up in a trailer park," the blonde shrugged. "It's something that always humiliated him. He hated that he wasn't able to give me and my mom the things he thought we deserved, and that it made him less of a man for it. So he channeled it into

encouraging me, making sure I had the best prospects so I could get a good paying job and live comfortably. When those... *pictures* of me got leaked, he thought that I had ruined that chance."

"But Ringo," Nancy tried to reason, "that doesn't make it okay. You're his daughter, and those pictures of you were a violation. It was his job to protect you and defend you, and he didn't."

"I know," she whispered in admittance, "but he tried to apologise finally a few months after I came home. And when he called me and asked could we meet up so he could say it to me in person, I had told him that I wasn't interested in anything he had to say."

The more she talked, the thicker her voice became. Nancy, noticing this, only tightened her grip harder.

"He may not have been the best dad but he was still *my* dad, you know?" She finally broke, letting out the pain of her loss into her cousin's shoulder. Ringo couldn't remember if she cried before about it, or if she had even allowed herself to.

"It's okay to be upset about it," Nancy comforted, rubbing the side of her shoulder.

"I'm sorry for what I said about Barb," she said suddenly, leaning out of her grip to wipe her damp cheeks and look her in the eye. "I know how much it hurts you that she'll never get justice for her death."

"You were just being rational..." she responded quietly, shaking her head sadly and tucking hair behind her ear.

"If you want to do something about it," the teenager dropped her voice to a whisper, always paranoid there were ears listening in, "I won't discourage it."

They shared a look, not needing words to speak as Nancy clearly understood - Ringo wasn't going to stop Nancy from telling Barb's parents. She also knew Nancy well enough to know how smart her cousin was, she would find a way to dodge the contracts that bound them into silence.

Nancy sighed, not out of tiredness but out of relief. Finally, she didn't

feel like she was being stupid for wanting her best friend's death to receive the attention it deserves.

"Anyways," Nancy kicked up, her voice lighter and a smirk on her coral-pink lips, "what's going on with you and Steve?"

Ringo's face, for the second time today, was as red as Carol's hair. She sputtered out in shock, rolling her eyes dramatically in an over-exaggerated attempt of appearing nonchalant.

"There is no *me and Steve*," she denied, waving her hand in the air.

"You're right," Nancy agreed. "Because it's 'Steve and *I*' not 'me and Steve'."

"Oh," she huffed in annoyance, "go away."

"I know you like him," she revealed, a soft smile on her lips to show her she wasn't at all pissed off by that fact.

"I just- but it's like I told you before! I won't ever date him, because he dated you and you're my cousin. And my best friend."

"Ringo," Nancy tried to settle the rambling girl. "Go for it."

"I don't even like h-" she stopped, "wait what?"

"Steve and I... we had a thing. And our thing didn't work out, but honestly? I don't think it was ever meant to be Steve and I. I think, even before you two knew it, he was meant to be with you." Nancy's words could have made her cry all over again, and Ringo secretly had to pinch her thigh to make sure she wasn't dreaming. Or on LSD.

"Besides," Nancy continued when she was too shocked to answer, "he makes you happy. And I know that sometimes you get a little sad about everything, so if you're holding back on my account please know that I don't want you to."

"God, Nancy," Ringo choked up, reaching to bring her into a tight hug. "We don't deserve you. I don't deserve you."

"No need to thank me for giving you permission to date my ex," she

chuckled, hugging her in return. When they broke apart, she noticed the excited glint in her eye. Ringo was practically bouncing on the couch, ready to take off at any moment - likely to tell Steve.

Nancy snorted, "go on then."

Not having to be told twice, Ringo shot off like a bullet, pressing a quick kiss and an apology to her cousins cheek.

Nancy's eyes followed the blonde as she practically climbed over furniture to reach Jonathan's room - where the boys had been eagerly waiting their reunion. In truth, she felt like the conversation had finally closed the door on her relationship with Steve. Now that it was well and truly over, she could focus on other things.

The first and most important - Barb.

"So, I'm sure you and Ringo will make a good couple," Jonathan awkwardly remarked, unable to bear the silence any longer. Steve startled, shocked he had even spoken. He had been busying himself looking at Jonathan's record collection, for ten minutes straight.

"Oh- we're not together, she doesn't want to date unless Nancy is okay with it?," he explained, nodding his head.

"Oh."

"But hey!" Steve exclaimed, holding out a hand to you, "you and Nancy will be great too! You're both really... intellectual."

"Nancy and I aren't together," Jonathan scoffed, face brightening and posture stiffening.

"Well, I mean - it's gonna happen," he stated obviously, "it's you and Nancy. There's... a thing there."

Saving Jonathan from the horror of this conversation, was a flustered Ringo Wheeler bursting through his bedroom door, her sights directly on Steve the second she spotted him.

"Oh, no," he refused, before she even spoke, placing the record down.

"I'm not driving you anywhere until you both make up."

"We made up!" She sighed, rolling her eyes to the ceiling before marching forward and gripping his hand. "We need to talk."

With that revelation, she began to drag him out of Jonathan's room.

"Hey, we'll finish our talk another day!" Steve called to him, smirking wickedly.

"Mhm," he hummed, waiting until they were out of sight before speaking again, "not a chance in hell."

Ringo didn't stop tugging him until they were safely and privately inside his car, and when they were alone, she found if she didn't stop talking her internal panic would take over.

"Okay, so I spoke to Nancy and she said it's okay and I was like, 'noooooo it's not, but she said it is and actually encouraged it because apparently you make me happy, I don't think so but whatever-' her overrunning sentence was spoke in one breath, and only stopped when Steve slapped his palm over her mouth before she hyperventilated. A wide grin was lifting up the corners of his mouth.

"Are you saying what I think you're saying, Ringo Wheeler?" He teased, unable to deny the race of excitement running through him.

"Look," she sighed, pushing his hand off of her mouth and tucking her hair behind her ears. "You already know how I feel. So, if this is a game to you then just say and I'll... go cry in the corner but then move on like a champion."

"Ringo-"

"I'm so stupid for telling you how I feel, I know. You never even said you liked me too."

"*Ringo-*"

"I don't even know why I like you. Actually I do, I think you're the best guy I've ever met and you make me happier than an ice cream on a hot day-"

"I loke you." His interruption caught her off guard, until his actual words confused her as they sunk in.

"You what?"

"Woah, that's embarrassing," it was his turn to stutter and blush, "I was about to say 'I love you', then realised it was too early so I said 'I like you' but I already had 'love' out, and-"

Instead of using her hand to silence the rambles, Ringo leaned in and attached her lips to his, capturing him in a kiss.

Immediately he responded, all nervousness and embarrassment fading as she melted under his touch, his hand coming up to cup her cheek.

"Steve?" She asked, prompting him to hum in response. "I loke you too."

i'd honestly date every single person in their squad, i feel like writing this fic is gonna bite me in the ass because now my friends seem like slackers compared to Ringo, Jessica, Steve etc.

FINALLY, FINALLY, WE CAN MOVE ONTO THE ROMANCE IN THIS BOOK, and how it affects the season 2 storyline of course ;) i hope everyone liked this chapter and whats to come x

- their argument didnt last too long thank god because i hate when they dont talk, i live for strong female friendships! i hope you liked this chapter, stingo is officially underway!

harleyquinn87 - im so glad you think so! i'm always iffy about writing changes to the storyline in case people dont like it so that makes me so happy x

Candy95 - You're completely right about steve, so i hope this chapter redeemed him for you! I always slip in little reminders about the characters not being perfect just to keep them realistic i'm glad you like that! Ringo especially, because she is written as a physically attractive and funny girl, who steve likes, but she is by no means perfect. i hope you enjoyed this chapter and their

relationship to come ;)

vince basile jr - no worries about nancy! i can't stand stories that introduce an ex to stir things up just for the drama! nancy and ringo have a special relationship, and nancy is well and truly into Jonathan now, she just wants her friends to be happy! I hope you liked this chapter and especially the future ones because now they can finally start to date ;)

28. I Loke Vinyls

"**IS NANCY OFF TODAY?**" Steve asked, his arm casually hanging around Ringo's shoulder as they walked down the hallway together before their first class. It was a gesture they often did - in private. And Ringo tried to ignore the stares they were getting in the hallway.

"I'm not sure," she shrugged, "I haven't spoken to her since yesterday, she went to meet up with Jonathan last night."

"Oh?" He enquired, and although Ringo searched his tone for any hint of jealousy - she found none.

"Yeah," she hummed, catching eyes with Carol, who was not at all subtle with her staring. "Have you noticed people are staring at us today?"

"Now Ringo," he pretended to chastise her with a smirk, "don't let your popularity get to your head just because you're dating the most popular guy in school."

"Oh shut up," she rolled her eyes, playfully elbowing his stomach. "I actually thought they were staring because your hair has reached new heights today. Tell me, do you get MTV on that antenna?"

"Okay, okay," he chuckled, dropping his hand from her shoulder down to the back pocket of her jeans. Ringo's eyes widened at the feeling of his hand basically on her ass, and from the small gasp she heard from the girl next to her, knew what it meant.

Steve was publicly showing everyone that he was interested in her. Interested more than a friend. Ringo never had anyone actually publicly show an interest in her - the majority of her past lovers choosing to keep it private, out of embarrassment.

While most people would let it bother them, Ringo always tried to push it to the side. She knew that guys didn't want to publicly date her because of her poorer background, or because of her social class. But here Steve was, not giving a single damn about any of that.

Her heart warmed at the feeling. Stupidly, she found that she was falling more and more for Steve Harrington every day.

Deciding to play it off with humour, as she always did, she cocked an eyebrow and grinned cheekily up at him.

"You fishing for change in there?" She teased.

"I was actually looking for your ass, ever hear of squats?" He fired back, but she wasn't offended - she knew it was just their shared sense of humour.

"You don't get to have anything to do with my ass until you take me out on a proper date," she winked, reluctantly drawing away from his touch once they reached her locker.

"Wow, you guys," Jessica's dry, sarcastic voice met their ears, so they turned to see the girl herself, grinning. "Way to *shove* your heterosexuality down my throat!"

"I'm not saying there's anything *wrong* with being straight," Ringo continued with her, playing on a joke they shared about comments Jessica often heard from the older populace of Hawkins. "I'm just saying, how do they *know* they're straight at seventeen?"

Jessica chuckled, leaning against the locker door beside hers and looking back and forth between them while wagging her eyebrows.

"So, you two are the talk of the school," she informed them. Jessica already knew what went down between them - the well informed and gushing phone call she received from Ringo the night before told her all.

"Really?" Steve beamed, running his hand over his hair, "they talking about how handsome I am?"

"No they're wondering if your hair is big enough to house the homeless," Jessica commented, prompting Ringo to snort. Steve insecurely patted his hair, a frown on his expression, until Ringo had noticed and leaned up to kiss his cheek.

"I like your hair," she told him, "I'd happily live in it any day." Her

words had his grin returning in no time.

Jessica didn't even comment on their cheesiness, because as much as she enjoyed making fun of Steve Harrington, she loved seeing a warm blush and a happy smile on Ringo Wheeler's face so much more.

The bell rang, signalling it was time for their first class of the day. Jessica nodded a goodbye to the two before heading off, but Steve loitered behind as Ringo shoved her books in her bag.

Unable to hold it in any more, as soon as she closed her bag and locker door, he gently swung her around by the elbow and leaned down to capture her lips in his.

Ringo gasped in surprise, but melted into the kiss after a moment, her body leaning into his and her hand cupping his cheek. When they broke apart to leave, they did so with flushed cheeks and excited eyes.

"I'll see you at lunch!" He waved at her, scraping his hand through his long hair - an action she loved watching, and heading off to class.

Just before Ringo turned towards the opposite direction to leave for her own, the conversation between the two girls next to her at the lockers caught her attention.

"...*imagine dating your cousin's ex*," one of them whispered, a round of hysterical giggling following. But Ringo wouldn't allow herself to feel intimidated by their judgement. The only person's opinion on their relationship that mattered was Nancy, and her mother's.

So with a lopsided smirk and a sway in her walk, Ringo called out to her.

"I'd rather date my cousin's ex than marry my *own* cousin like your mama did, Becky," Ringo winked, practically skipping forward to class and leaving the brunette with a dumbfounded expression.

After a rather aggressive, and downright humiliating game of basketball with Billy Hargrove - Steve was in the showers. Washing off the layer of sweat that had accumulated during the game, he

couldn't help but roll his eyes when he sensed a presence come up to the shower beside his - a certain animosity in the air that told him who it was.

Steve and his gang had hated Billy Hargrove since he first stepped into town. At first, Steve was quick to pass him off as an asshole who made too many attempts at Nancy, Jessica and Ringo to be a decent guy. But the proverbial nail in the coffin was his blatant disregard for Jessica's sexuality. That was something the group wouldn't readily forgive.

He may have been closer to Ringo and Nancy than he was to Jessica, but she was his friend too, as surprising as it was to them both. He felt a certain degree of protectiveness over the girl.

Plus, he had never witnessed anything as hot in his life than the sight of Ringo damn near breaking his nose.

He could feel the little twerp's eyes on him, which admittedly - made Steve rather uncomfortable considering he was butt naked.

"Don't sweat it Harrington," Billy finally spoke after a minute of staring, "today's just not your day."

Steve ignored him, continuing to rinse shampoo from his hair, but Billy took this as a sign he felt embarrassed by his earlier loss.

"Don't take it too hard man," Billy's voice sounded out again, the teenager now having completely ignored the shower water to turn towards Steve. It was intimidating, and he knew it. "I hear you've got little Ringo Wheeler at your side now."

"And?" Steve responded drily, keeping his eyes forward in annoyance.

"Just wondering how you managed to do it," Billy grinned cheekily. "She's a feisty little thing, I'd have thought she'd be too much for you to handle."

"Why don't you let me worry about that, okay pal?" Steve bit back, finally looking down at the smaller man with narrowed eyes.

"I'm just saying," Billy held his hands in the air in defence. "You're

really making your way through the Wheeler family though, man." He slapped Steve on the back, 'playfully'. "Proud of ya!"

Before leaving, just to piss Steve off even further than he already had, Billy slammed off his shower tap before Steve was finished showering. Sauntering away from the shower room, he left Steve practically *glowering*.

Awkwardly, when Steve rapped his knuckles against the apartment door of Julia and Ringo Wheeler, it was the former who answered the door. Not the latter.

She took sight of Steve, who was awkwardly standing in the doorframe and cocked an eyebrow. In an attempt to dissolve the awkwardness, Steve started grinning crazily, although he was sure he merely looked like a mad man.

"Ringo!" Julia called out behind her, turning back to face Steve just as the sound of footsteps sounded down the hallway.

"Hey!" Ringo beamed upon seeing him, skipping past her mother and out into the corridor.

"Where are you two going?" Julia questioned.

"To have unprotected sex, I'm getting you a grandchild for your birthday," Ringo joked, causing Steve to choke on his own spit. Julia simply chuckled, much to his surprise, and rolled her eyes before shutting the door.

"You have the coolest mom," Steve commented as they began to walk towards the staircase.

"I know," she sighed happily, looking over her shoulder at him. "By the way, that wasn't true. We're not having sex."

Steve merely raised his eyebrows, "good to know."

Neither one of them had specified if this 'hanging out' session was actually a date - or if they were even boyfriend and girlfriend. The words weren't put out there, and if anyone had asked either of the

two they'd simply say they're 'just dating'.

Steve wanted to make Ringo his girlfriend, it was something he'd thought about for a very long time. But he also wanted to woo her, and to not at all rush into their relationship. He wanted to test the waters and bridge the 'friend zone' gap between them.

He had settled for telling her he wanted to drive up the mountain, to listen to music and share snacks. It was a casual affair, made all the more interesting by the two that were involved.

Steve drove carefully up the winding road towards the top of the small mountain, swapping commentary with Ringo along the way. She would sing casually along to songs that she liked, one foot on the seat and her arm leaning out the opened window as the wind rushed her hair.

Upon arriving, Steve had stopped the car and switched the engine off, leaving the radio on for them both to listen to as they ventured outside to lay down on the hood.

Ringo crawled up next to Steve, their backs against the windshield as their gazes were fixed on the stars above and the lights of Hawkins beneath them.

"You know," Ringo began, "I wanted to be an astronaut when I was a little girl."

"Really?" Steve asked.

"Yeah, because I wanted to go to the moon and stay there because I hated everyone so much," she explained with a chuckle, Steve soon joining in on her amusement.

"How would you survive?"

"I used to think that if there was no food on the moon that would mean anyone up there didn't *need* food?" Steve barked a laugh at this one.

"You were a right little dumbass weren't you?" He poked her side, causing her to flinch and smack his hand with a giggle.

"My family and I were actually supposed to live in Hawkins, you know?" She revealed, prompting Steve to turn his head to the side.

"Really?"

"Yeah," she nodded. "And then my dad got this big job in Florida, so we went there instead. My mom and dad are from here originally. We would have been in the same classes the whole time."

"A kid version of you? I wouldn't have been able to deal with it."

"I would have *hated* you," she laughed. "I hated everyone who was middle class and above in school."

"Why?" He questioned curiously, still staring at her.

"The 'big job' went under really quick and the company went bankrupt, and that's when we started living in a trailer. I didn't realise that it was something I was supposed to be embarrassed about, so at lunch time when everyone had lunch money and I didn't because we didn't have any they realised I was poor and started to tease me for it." She didn't look that sad when reminiscing about that period of her life, but Steve still frowned at hearing it. The idea that anyone would make fun of her, especially over something so stupid and out of her control, infuriated him.

"Ringo... I'm so sorry that happened to you," he tried to comfort her, his hand slipping down and fingers twining through hers.

"Oh, it was okay," she shrugged, a small smile on her lips as she looked down at their conjoined hands, "for every kid that teased me, I snuck dead roaches I found in the girl's bathroom into their lockers."

"Ringo-" he broke off to laugh, smacking a palm over his eyes.

"I'm serious! And it happened so many times to so many lockers that the school had to be shut down for a month because they were convinced they had a roach problem," she smirked in amusement, not at all feeling guilty for her actions.

"Well I wouldn't have teased you," Steve told her sincerely. "Actually, I'd have helped you put dead bugs in their lockers. Roach girl."

Ringo rolled her eyes and leaned in to kiss his lips, her heart racing every time she did so. She couldn't believe their relationship had reached a point where she could actually lean in and kiss him now, not just imagine it.

He hummed against her lips, tucking her blonde hair behind her ear with his free hand. He seemed to remember something suddenly, as he shot up with an 'oh' and scampered off the car.

"Where are you going?" Her expression twisted in confusion.

"I got you something," he called back, head disappearing as he opened the door to the back seat and reached for a box.

"I don't need gifts you know!"

"I know," he grinned, rounding the car until he was in full view again. "Just take it. And before you start to refuse, shut up."

Curiosity getting the best of her, she pushed aside her growing frown to lean over and peer inside the box, eyebrows furrowing at the sight. It was a variety of used vinyls - ones that had very familiar crease marks and covers.

Ringo reached in and flipped through them, recognising after a moment that these were *her* vinyls. More specifically, the ones she had sold to help her mom with the rent money.

"Steve-... what?" She stammered in confusion, looking up to see his grin.

"Ryan Peterson didn't want to give them back at first, but we haggled," he shrugged, sitting back down on the hood with the box between them.

"Steve!" She chastised. "You shouldn't have! You know we don't take charity," she tried to push the box back towards him, but he quickly grabbed onto her wrists.

"It's not charity," he reassured her, "think of it as... I really want to be able to listen to music whenever I go to your room."

She frowned, but accepted his attempt at making her feel better none the less. To her horror, tears began to prick at her eyes, for she was truly touched by the gesture. Nobody had ever in her life paid as much attention to her words and feelings like Steve did.

"Thank you..." she whispered, scared if she spoke too much, the floodgates would open.

"You're welcome, babe," he leaned in and pressed a kiss to her forehead, wrapping one arm around her and encouraging her to lay back down beside him.

"I loke you," she told him, repeating his jumbled word from a few days before. Steve groaned audibly and rolled his eyes, although the grin on his lips would tell you he wasn't at all bothered.

"You're never going to let that go are you?"

"Never," she hummed, kissing his cheek and curling against his side. "I just *loke* my vinyls."

"Shut up," he grumbled.

"You have to say it back," she sang, staring at him with widened eyes until he positively melted.

"*Fine*," he huffed, "I loke you too."

hi again!

I actually like how this chapter turned out. it's a nice filler before the events of season 2 continue, and I'm really excited to write some Dustin, Steve and Ringo scenes!

Thanks everyone who read and reviewed, it means the world!

candy95 - Jonathan and Nancy will be MIA while they try to get #justiceforbarb, but they'll be back soon enough! I'm glad you liked that chapter I hope you like this one too!x

harleyquinn87 - Ahhhh thank you! It's so exciting to finally write

their relationship after building it up for so long!

Court725 - I see what you did there muahaha, you're so sweet thank you so much! That means the world! I hope you like what's to come x

- Ahhhh thank you! I'm so glad you liked it!

Vince Basile Jr - I hope you liked this one then, plenty of school stuff and fluff! Your comment is sooooo sweet I love reading your reactions! Thank you so much and I hope you liked this one! x

29. Charlie's Angels

STEVE HARRINGTON DIDN'T OFTEN GET NERVOUS, but it was just another new development that Ringo had brought to his life. Anxiously, he tapped his fingers against the steering wheel, eyes glancing back and forth between the road and the roses that were settled on the passenger seat.

He had been out with Ringo before so many times, but this was different. This time, they would be going on an official date.

Steve had fretted all day over their plans - whether she wanted to go to a restaurant or if she even would feel uncomfortable with that. In the end, he settled for a picnic that he personally prepared (meaning sandwiches and cans of coke).

Ringo was far more difficult to take out than any other girl he had ever dated. She didn't go wide-eyed over expensive jewellery and fancy restaurants, he knew that a girl like Ringo Wheeler only ever wanted something meaningful - not just something pretty and costly.

The roses he decided he simply had to include, for she herself had said she never was truly treated well by any previous guys she was with. Steve intended to break that cycle today.

Elsewhere, a couple of blocks away, Dustin was similarly eagerly making his way towards Ringo Wheeler's home. Instead of a car, he rode on the back of his bike as fast as he could, desperate to enlist the girl's help with his hellish new pet.

It seemed logical he would choose to ask for her help - his own friends, including Jonathan and Nancy, were M.I.A. as of late.

The second he reached her apartment building he practically flung his bike into the grass after hopping off of it, praying that she would be home. If it had been a less stressful situation, he would have been happy to see the girl as his crush remained undying. But there was no time for that today.

Steve happened to arrive, conveniently, at the same time as Dustin.

Except he didn't even notice the younger boy, too preoccupied with checking his hair in the rear view mirror and rehearsing what he would say to Ringo.

"Would you, Ringo, do me the pleasure of escorting-" he cut himself off with an eye roll, finally looking away from the mirror and reaching for the door handle. "Jesus, what am I? A hundred years old?"

As he rounded the car, the sight of the tall, fluffy haired teenager stopped Dustin in his tracks - excitedly so.

"Steve!" He yelled, jogging towards him just as he reached the steps to the entrance.

Steve slowed down considerably, but continued up until he was at the door, looking at the Henderson boy in confusion.

"What?" He asked, the bouquet of roses clutched in hand.

"Are you going to get Ringo?" Dustin pressed, meeting him at the door.

"Yeah-" he began, but was cut off by Dustin yanking the roses out of his hand and suddenly sprinting through the open door towards the staircase, ready to run the entire way to her apartment.

"Hey!" Steve bellowed, chasing behind him. "Give that back!"

"I need you guy's help! Let's get Ringo!" Dustin called over his shoulder, practically taking the steps two at a time. "Hurry up, damn! I thought you did sports!"

"We kinda have plans, Dustin!" Steve replied frustratedly, hot on Dustin's heels.

"We have bigger problems than your love life, Steve," Dustin retorted, holding the bouquet up. "Roses? Seriously?"

"What? It's romantic!"

Before Dustin could add to the insult, he raced up the correct hallway

to her door, panting breathlessly from the exertion while Steve coolly followed behind. The latter of the two knocked politely, but when she didn't answer within five seconds, Dustin hit his fists against the wood impatiently.

"Jesus, who died?" She hissed the second she opened the door, her face contorted with equal parts confusion and anger. Steve had silently wished Julia opened the door instead, so she could rip Dustin apart for banging on her door.

"We need your help!" Dustin demanded, all but throwing the bouquet at her, causing her to fumble about in an attempt at not dropping it.

"With what?" She questioned, eyeing him suspiciously, but Dustin had taken off again.

"Hey, you look beautiful," Steve stepped toward her, unphased by Dustin's panic as he leaned in and pressed a sweet kiss to her forehead, causing her heart to flutter. "The roses are for you."

"Thank you," she smiled bashfully, cheeks heating up as she carefully placed them on a table beside the door and stepped into the hallway.

"Come *on*, people! Is this how you all would act in a fire?" Dustin yelled from the door to the staircase, waving his hand in an attempt to get them to hurry up.

"What's his damage?" Ringo whispered to Steve as they were pressured to jog to catch up with him, staying at each other's side as they followed Dustin down to the street again.

"He won't say," Steve shrugged with narrowed eyes, slightly peeved that Dustin was so heavily interrupting.

"Steve, you still got that bat?" Dustin asked as he helped himself into Steve's backseat, keeping the door open so he could talk to them before they entered the car.

"What bat?"

"The one with nails."

"Why?"

"Just get it!" Dustin huffed, eyes fixating on Ringo. "Sweet cheeks, still got that axe?"

"Wow, I must have left it in my other purse," she drawled sarcastically, "but call me sweet cheeks again and I'll use it on *you*."

"I have it in the trunk with my bat, don't worry," Steve murmured to her as they separated to sit in their respective car seats. Ringo raised an eyebrow at this, buckling her seatbelt and gesturing at Dustin to do the same, who rolled his eyes and followed.

"Why would you have that?" She tilted her head.

"Never know when the Mystery Inc has to get back together," he winked at her, before turning to put the car in drive, heading off in the directions Dustin was giving.

The first thing Ringo did while Dustin finally explained what he desperately needed help with, was to look at Steve with a bored look in her eyes.

"So," she began, turning to look at Dustin in the backseat. "Have you tried taking it to the vet?"

"No- it's not a dog, Ringo!" He exclaimed in frustration.

"How do you know it's not a dog?" She continued. "I've seen some demonic, ugly ass dogs back in the trailer park."

"Because it grew like three times its size in a week!" He huffed, shaking his head in disbelief. "Jesus, you ran an axe through a demogorgan and don't believe this could happen?"

"Wait a second, how big did it get?" Steve interrupted, looking to Dustin in the rear view mirror for an answer.

"First it was like this," he made a measurement with his hands, "and now he's like this," he widened the gap between his palms.

Ringo couldn't help but snort, childishly amused by the gesture.

"You sure it's a creature and not a penis?"

"Ringo-" Steve's laughter cut his own words off, booming through the car and only furthering Dustin's frustration. "Look, I swear to god man, it's probably just some kind of lizard or something," he continued when he calmed down.

"If you're dragging my ass out here for a lizard, Dustin I swear-" Ringo threatened.

"It's not a lizard!" He threw his hands in the air in exasperation.

"Well, how do you know?" Steve asked.

"How do I know it's not just a lizard?"

"Yeah! How do you know it's not just a lizard!" His voice turning to a shout, clearly frustrated his plans for a date with Ringo were interrupted for what was most likely nothing.

"Because it's face opened up and it ate my cat!" He yelled back, silencing Steve's protests. Ringo whipped around in the seat again with eyes widened in horror.

"What?! Well what the hell are we supposed to do? Lay down rat traps?!"

Just as she finished talking, Steve pulled into the Henderson driveway, prompting Dustin to jump out of the car once it stopped before he could argue them any more. He would prove it to them that he wasn't being silly.

Steve gestured with his head towards the trunk of his car, Ringo and Dustin quick to follow. She shivered in the cold night air from her lack of a jacket, and before Steve could offer her anything, Dustin cut in.

"Here, Ringo! Take my jacket!" He reached for the zip sleeves, ready to tug it off and hand it to her.

"Um... thanks but I think your size is a little smaller than mine," she played it off politely, watching as Steve opened the trunk to his car and reached for his own spare jacket that he always kept stored. He handed it over to Ringo, dropping his left eye in a wink as he did so.

Eagerly, she shrugged it on over her shoulders, welcoming the heat on her cold skin. It was too big for her, but she didn't mind.

"Yeah, that doesn't look like your size either," Dustin enviously remarked under his breath.

"Here, babe," Steve grabbed for the axe, passing it gently into Ringo's waiting hands. She tested the weight of it, never thinking she'd see a day where she'd hold it again.

As she remarked upon its familiarity, Steve hoisted up his infamous nailed bat and shut the trunk, raising it up as the trio began to walk towards the garden - Dustin leading the way.

The curly haired boy led them straight to a set of red doors, buried into the ground that surely led to a sort of basement. Ringo recoiled at the sight of the padlock keeping the doors closed, immediately uncomfortable with the idea of venturing inside even if she didn't agree with Dustin's story.

They waited for a minute, listening intently, and Ringo begged silently that Steve wouldn't want to play the hero and go inside, where she'd have to follow of course.

"I don't hear shit," he remarked.

"He's in there," Dustin replied ominously.

"Can't it *stay* in there?" Ringo narrowed her eyes, "what do you really *need* a basement for? Christmas decorations?"

Dustin threw her a glare, which she responded to with one of her own. The two were engaged in a stare off until Steve smacked the head of his bat against the metal door, causing them to snap out of it with a jump.

He waited for a second, before hitting it again, the thud much harder

and louder this time. Ringo waited with bated breath, still not hearing anything.

Annoyed, Steve raised the glare of his flashlight up to Dustin's face, temporarily blinding him.

"Alright I swear kid, if this is some kind of prank-" he kept the light shining on the boy's face, "you're dead."

"Yeah," Ringo agreed. "And I'll tell the boys you wear underwear with days of the week written on them."

"How did you know that?!" Dustin demanded, cheeks heating up.

"I didn't, but now I do!"

"Look, it's not a prank, all right!" He scowled, pushing at the torch. "Get that out of my face."

"You got a key for this thing?" Steve prompted, much to his date's discontent. As Dustin fished the key out of his pocket, she took a moment to voice her distaste for the idea.

"A dark basement? You'd be the first to die in a horror movie, Steve."

"You don't have to come," he lightly shoved her shoulder with his own. "But if you do, don't worry I'll protect ya."

"If anything I'll be the one watching your ass," she grumbled. In awe of how she still looked cute despite her annoyance, Steve couldn't help but swoop in and press a lingering kiss to the corner of her mouth. The action soon dissipated the worry from her expression.

"What the hell!" Dustin called out, breaking them away from their moment. "Hello! Demon dog in the basement! Swing your bat, not your lips!"

Steve caught the keys as Dustin tossed them, crouching down to open up the doors with a creaking sound that echoed inside. Timidly, the blonde shone the flashlight down the set of concrete steps, worried for what she might see at the end of the beam.

"He must be further down there," Dustin remarked.

"Of course he is," she retorted, "he's down there chilling with Freddy Krueger and Michael Myers."

"I'll stay up here. In case it tries to escape."

"You know," Ringo became inspired, "I should stay up here too. I mean, what's Dustin gonna do? I'm the one with the axe."

Steve threw them both an exasperated look, before reaching for the flashlight in her hand and starting to trail down the steps, slowly.

Ringo held her breath at the top, equal parts worried for Steve and for herself if the demon dog decided to make a run for it. She gripped the handle of her axe with both hands until her knuckles whitened.

Every second felt like a minute and the more Steve was away, the more concerned she became.

"Steve?" She tentatively called out, listening intently for any sound incurring he was still there. Tensions rose as dead silence filled the air, prompting Ringo to suddenly become very fearful something was about to happen - if horror movies had taught her anything.

He finally appeared in their view, so suddenly that both Ringo and Dustin jumped in shock - although the former of the two let out a slight scream.

"I will fucking *dump* you, Steve Harrington," she yelled down at him, hand clutching her chest to still her racing heart.

"Get down here," he demanded, nodding his head towards the area behind him and stifling a laugh at her rage. As the two shuffled down to inspect, Steve waited until Ringo had reached him to move, wrapping his arm around her shoulders and giving her a light squeeze as a form of an apology.

"Oh shit," Dustin's comment dragged her attention forward to the goopy skin that hung off of Steve's bat.

"What the hell?" She remarked, staring at it in disgust. "What is it?"

"Oh, *shit*!" Dustin reiterated, capturing their attentions towards a hole that was burrowed into the wall. The trio headed towards it to better look at it, but when Steve shone the light down it was clear that whatever was here was long gone.

"I don't suppose your mother is a mole, Dustin?" Ringo asked him, crouching down and peering into the dark tunnel.

"This shit better not be happening again," Ringo remarked, tossing a canister of gasoline into the shopping cart as she and Steve hurriedly made their way around a 24-hour supermarket for 'supplies', while Dustin waited in the car.

"What shit?" Steve inquired, looking over the array of uncooked meat on selection they could lure 'Dart' in with.

"The whole 'giant ass demon tries to kill me and my friends deal'," she huffed, making the decision to toss in a bag of Lays chips as well. If they were going continue searching for the thing all night, she was going to have snacks.

"I know," he huffed, pushing the cart in the direction of the tills. "I made a freakin' picnic for us and everything."

"You did?" She caught onto his words, awing at his revelation.

"Yeah," he muttered, trying to act cool in the face of the girl he liked. "Just sandwiches, it's no big deal."

"You so like me," she hummed, happily grinning as they waited in line and began to lift their items onto the conveyor belt.

"Well yeah," he screwed up his expression, "I literally told you I did."

"See," she pointed out, "you *do* like me."

Steve rolled his eyes playfully at her goofiness, paying the cashier the required amount while she looked at their items with suspicion.

"This some kinda weird party y'all are setting up?" She nosily asked, handing him his change.

"Just a barbecue," Ringo explained, watching as the cashier rudely checked her watch and raised her eyebrows at the late hour, clearly not believing her lie.

"Um..." she stammered, "I'm European. Time is a social construct for me."

"Finally!" Dustin exclaimed when they reached the car, digging through their bags of 'groceries'.

"Hey, where are your friends anyway? Shouldn't they be the ones chasing monsters with you?" Ringo asked suddenly, ripping open her bag of chips and starting to munch away.

"They're completely MIA. So I'm stuck with you two."

"Now that I think about it," Steve began, starting the car's engine and putting it into drive. "Nancy and Jonathan have been gone lately too."

"So we're like the leftovers, here to save the world," Dustin sarcastically remarked, "kinda like the Scooby Doo gang."

"No, we already have a Scooby Doo gang. We need a new name for this band," Ringo interjected, tapping her finger on her chin as she mused. "I know! We'll be Charlie's Angels!"

"Seriously?" Dustin whined, at the exact same time as Steve did.

Happy Christmas everyone!

A little Christmas present from me to you. Finally we're fully in the swing of season 2, I hope everyone likes this direction I'm taking and that Ringo and Steve's relationship is still well presented!

To anyone that celebrates it, I hope you have a wonderful Christmas and you enjoy this chapter x

Court725 - I realllly like how you respond well to the OCs in the book, it's such a compliment because of course people read fics with the intention of reading the canon characters only. So to hear you

like Jessica and Julia is so nice to hear! Thanks as always! x

Vince Basile Jr - Ahhhhhh! Your reviews are always so uplifting I look forward to them every week! Ringo and Steve are too mature for petty drama anyway ;) I hope you liked this one x

Judging. All day every day - One daddy Ringo and mommy Steve coming right up! Thanks so much sweetie! x

candy95 - Finally hitting more of the canon events now! Can't believe I've gone through a season and a half of the show already! x

sukondis - Ahhh that makes so happy!

- that is such a compliment wow! Thank you! To be honest, I find it hard watching Stranger Things now cos all I do is see parts where Ringo could fit in. I'm so glad you think their relationship flows well, that's most important I reckon for a book with an OC pairing. Thanks as always and It hope you like the chapter!

30. Farrah Fawcett

"DUSTIN, ARE YOU THERE? IT'S LUCAS," a voice crackled through the walkie talkie attached to Dustin's hip. Scoffing a little, the boy unhitched it from his belt and stepped away from the trunk of Steve's car to talk to his friend.

While he did so, Ringo and Steve were left to cart the items out, their hands covered by bright yellow kitchen gloves. The blonde had shoved her hair up into a bun, wisps of hair falling from it out of exertion. Even while her hair was messy and her face was red from lifting, not to mention she was currently holding two buckets filled with raw meat, Steve thought she looked rather cute.

"Those gloves really suit you, you should keep them for later and we'll get kinky," he teased, dropping his eye in a wink.

"Oh fuck off, Steve," she huffed in laughter, settling the buckets down onto the ground and wiping her forehead with the sleeve of her shirt.

"Well why you were having sister problems," Dustin continued in the background, "Dart grew again, he escaped and I'm pretty sure he's a baby demogorgan."

"What?" Ringo hissed, placing her hands on her hips and swivelling around to the curly haired teenager. "When did we say that? I was hoping it was still some kind of dog with rabies."

"Wait, what?" Lucas's voice crackled down the line while Dustin waved Ringo off with his hand.

"I'll explain later just meet me, Ringo and Steve down at the old junkyard."

"Steve? And Ringo? As in Steve Harrington and Ringo Wheeler?"

"Noooo," Dustin drawled sarcastically, "it's Ringo Starr. We met him in Brainshakes and he decided to tag along for the ride. Of course it's Ringo freakin' Wheeler, how many Ringo's do you know?"

"What's Steve doing there then?"

"Please," Dustin rolled his eyes, "as if Steve would ever leave her damn side."

At his words, Steve sighed out of shame, but Ringo merely waggled her eyebrows at him suggestively. They shrugged their backpacks on, with Steve's bat poking out of his and Ringo's axe tied to the front of hers. They each carried a bucket of meat each, with Steve carting along a canister of gasoline to boot.

"Monsters again?" Ringo groaned. "Why can't I just have normal teenage problems, like worrying about missing my period or bacne?"

"What's bacne?" Dustin asked as they ventured inside the woodland.

"Acne on your back, doofus," Steve explained, rolling his eyes.

"I think it's kind of exciting, I mean think of all the lame shit every other teenager in Hawkins is doing right now. I bet Danny Pullman is jerking off," Dustin snickered to himself.

"Hey! Gross!" Steve called out, shaking his head in disgust.

"Oh yeah," Ringo beamed, "nothing more riveting than near death experiences."

"Wait, what happens if you miss your period? What's a period?" Dustin asked in confusion, prompting Ringo and Steve to meet eyes, horrified at the prospect of answering.

"Um... you know how werewolves change at the full moon?" Steve tried to explain.

"I don't *turn* into a werewolf, Steve," Ringo shoved his shoulder in annoyance, furrowing her brows at the metaphor.

"Of course not," Steve agreed, "but you have to agree, you're not all sunshine and rainbows either."

"Guys, I'm fucking with you," Dustin held his hands up, "I didn't mean to start World War freakin' 3."

"Oh, babe," Steve chuckled, inching closer to her until he was able to

wrap his arm securely around her shoulders and hug her close, "on your next full moon, how about I buy you your favourite candy?"

"...a gobstopper?" She couldn't help but smile, her resolve easing away.

"God, it's like you guys are rubbing it in my face," Dustin complained, walking ahead of them. "Well, unluckily for *you*, Ringo, I've found someone else."

"Shut up," she grinned after gasping, letting go of Steve's side to catch up with the younger boy. "Who? You have to tell me!"

"I bet he's lying," Steve teased. "Or she's a video game character."

"I'm not lying! And she's *real*! You know just for that, I'm not telling you anything now."

"Is it... Becca Murray?" Ringo guessed, tossing another slab of meat down onto the dilapidated train tracks they were currently walking on.

"No, god no," Dustin shook his head in disgust, "she smells like pee."

"Oh, I know! Is it the sister of that guy that runs the arcade?" Steve put forth, following after Ringo and repeating her actions.

"No! You're never going to guess it so stop trying!"

"Alright then so tell me this, how did you end up with a baby demogorgan as a pet?" Ringo questioned, eyes narrowed with suspicion.

"Yeah, I think I'd like to know as well," Steve hummed, "I need to know if stupid decisions are a regular occurrence with you while I'm helping you."

"Chill," Dustin rolled his eyes. "Look, I thought it was a really cool new breed of animal that I found, so I kept him. It was neat at the time, okay? And I was trying to... *impress* someone."

"And when did you start to realise, 'crap, this isn't a gecko, this is a demon!'" Steve pressed, shaking his head with ridiculousness.

"Look, I got attached! You wouldn't put down a puppy if it ate your cat, would you?"

"Well, if its face opened up I'd certainly not let it sleep at the foot of my bed," Ringo answered with a shrug.

"So let me get this straight," Steve began, "you kept that thing, knowing it could be dangerous, to impress a girl?"

"Alright, that's grossly oversimplifying things," Dustin protested.

"Why would a girl like some nasty slug anyway?" Steve recoiled, nodding towards Ringo. "Would *you* want one, Wheeler?"

"Oh yeah," she scoffed, "nothing makes me drop my panties faster than a giant slug!"

"But an *interdimensional* slug?" Dustin responded, "now that's awesome."

"Wow," Ringo deadpanned, "forget the panties I'd get naked."

"Well even if she thought it was cool, which I doubt she did," Steve hesitated, wondering how he was going to soften his impending words, "I feel like you're trying way too hard."

"He's not trying too hard," Ringo disagreed, wincing slightly, "you're just... not going about it the right way."

"Well, not everyone can have Steve's perfect hair alright?" He muttered, clearly downtrodden from their words. Feeling guilty, Ringo smiled sadly and wrapped one arm around his shoulder.

"It's not about the hair," she told him.

"Yeah," Steve agreed, taking over Ringo's meat throwing duty while she comforted Dustin, "the key to girls is just acting like you don't care."

"What?" Ringo recoiled, looking at Steve with an amused expression.

"Even if you do?" Dustin asked, seemingly disbelieving.

"Yeah it drives them nuts."

"Okay no," Ringo sighed, "don't listen to him. That's now how you get a girl's attention. Steve, you never acted like you don't care around me."

"Um, hello," Steve held his hand up, "we hated each other when we first met."

"Yeah, but you were really nice to me after you got over yourself," Ringo smiled smartly. "Dustin, the key to getting the girl is to build up tension. Be cool, but not so cool that it looks like you think you're better than her. Make her laugh and remember little details about her. Oh, and physical contact! Stuff like hugs and shoulder bumps."

"Then what?" Dustin questioned innocently.

"Wait until you can feel it," Steve declared. "It's like before it's gonna storm, you know? You can't see it, but you can feel it, like this.. uh-electricity."

Without intending to, his gaze drifted to Ringo, deciding that there was no better word to describe what those two had other than pure *electricity*. Seemingly, she had the same thought, her eyes flitting to his face with a smile growing on her lips.

"Oh, like in the electromagnetic field when the clouds in the atmosphere-" Dustin's voice broke their overly cheesy moment.

"No, no, no, no, no, like a sexual electricity."

"Oh," Dustin said dumbly while Ringo's eyes widened and she moved to cover his ears.

"Hello! He's a kid!" She refuted.

"I'm thirteen, Ringo," he whined, batting her gloved hands away from his ears.

"Anyway," Steve continued, "you feel that, then you make your move."

"And by move, he means kissing. You're too young for anything else," Ringo added with a nod.

"Hey, woah, slow down, babe," Steve waved his hands. "Some girls, like *Ringo* apparently, want you to be aggressive. Strong, and hot and heavy, like... I don't know, a lion."

"Yeah, because *I'm* the one that just grabbed you and kissed you in the middle of the street," she muttered under her breath.

"But others you gotta be slow, stealthy, like a ninja."

"So you had to be hot and heavy with Ringo?" Dustin prompted out of curiosity, causing the girl in question to blush red.

"I was kidding, Ringo's different," Steve replied without hesitation, wrapping his arm around her waist. "She's not like other girls."

"You are pretty special, Ringo," Dustin agreed, causing her to audibly awe at his adorableness and hug him from the side with the arm that wasn't around Steve.

"I think you're pretty special too, Dustin. And if she can't see that, then you'll find someone who does."

"But that's the thing," Dustin murmured, feeling bashful all of a sudden, "this girl is special too. It's just like, something about her."

"Woah woah, you're not falling in love with this girl are you?" Steve stopped, swivelling around to face Dustin and dropping his hold on Ringo to do so.

"You're too damn young to fall in love," Ringo added, stopping as well. "You need to focus on school and your friends, young man."

"I'm not!" Dustin denied.

"Maybe Ringo and I should meet this girl," Steve mused, "suss her out, see if she's good enough for you."

"I agree," the blonde girl hummed. "Steve, we should invite her to dinner. My place or yours?"

"Woah, guys-" Dustin tried to put a stop to it, his hands in the air in defence.

"My place, the poor girl won't be ready for Julia Wheeler yet," Steve bantered. "I learned how to make lasagna the other day."

"How is this supposed to get her to like me?" Dustin shouted, recapturing the couple away from their domesticated plans.

Steve and Ringo shared a glance, clearly unable to settle on any one way to get this girl to like Dustin, and knowing full well it was impossible to force someone to have feelings for you.

With an embarrassed sigh, Steve reluctantly offered Dustin something else that wasn't advice on crushes, but hair tips.

"It's Fabergé," he huffed as he walked ahead, avoiding Ringo's eye.

"What is?" Dustin asked, clearly having never heard of the brand, while his fellow blonde companion definitely had.

"It's Fabergé organics," Steve explained. "Use the shampoo and the conditioner, and when your hair is damp - *damp*, not wet okay it's *damp*-"

"Damp," Dustin echoed.

"Stop saying damp, I'm uncomfortable," Ringo sounded.

"When it's damp, use four pumps of the Farrah Fawcett spray."

"*Farrah Fawcett?!'*" Ringo practically shrieked, doubling over with laughter, her entire body shaking.

Dustin couldn't help but follow, his seriousness breaking at the sight of Ringo's obvious amusement, soon enough the duo were both laughing at Steve's admission.

"Wow, okay," he grumbled, "I try to help the kid and this is what I

get."

"I'm sorry, babe," Ringo tried to speak through her chuckles, wiping her eyes with the sleeve of her t shirt instead of her meat soaked gloves. "But come on, Farrah Fawcett."

"You tell anyone I just told you that," Steve turned to Dustin, his finger pointed accusatorially in his face, "and your ass is grass. You're dead, Henderson."

Dustin nodded in understanding walking ahead again to escape Steve's glare. Meanwhile, Ringo shimmied up to his side once more, eyes bright with amusement.

"What about me?" She wagged her eyebrows, "is my ass grass?"

"Most definitely," Steve nodded, suddenly dropping his bucket of meat onto the ground and scooping Ringo up to rest over his shoulder, eliciting a shout of surprise.

"Put me down, Farrah," she laughed, tossing her bucket down as well, "Jessica is going to *die* when she hears this."

"You won't tell a *soul*, Ringo!" He demanded, placing her back down on her feet to stand in front of him.

"Or what?" She challenged with a smirk.

"Or... or- I'll dump you!"

"Nice one," she giggled, rolling her eyes and picking up the bucket again, throwing forth a chunk of meat. "You love me too much."

Steve didn't deny her, for he knew it was true. Besides, he and Ringo hadn't officially said they were together yet anyway. Even though they acted as if they were, there was still that unspoken air between them where they had yet to define their relationship.

The old junkyard was just that - an old junkyard. Numerous abandoned cars littered the open field, and one inoperative school bus. Ringo found herself wishing she had found this place before,

envisioning the parties and downtime she could have spent here with her friends.

After a long walk from where Steve had parked his car, it was past midday when they reached the lot, immediately deeming it suitable for Operation Catch-That-Sunuvabitch, as Ringo affectionately called it.

Ringo tossed the entirety of the buckets leftover contents near the entrance to the lot, while Steve deposited his in the centre of the cars, drafting up ways they could trap the wild beast.

"I said medium-well!" A voice called out suddenly, prompting all heads to turn and see Lucas standing next to an unrecognisable ginger girl.

Sighing, Ringo snapped her gloves off and tossed them into the empty bucket, shivering in disgust and relief at having them finally removed as she moved to stand next to Dustin and Steve.

"Who's that?" Ringo asked, at the exact time Steve did. Upon realising they said the same thing, they held their fingers up to one another and shouted 'jinx!'

But when they looked back to Dustin, who was stood in between them both, their amused smiles faded at the seemingly sad expression on his own face. His eyes were fixed on the girl they didn't know, leading them both to come to the conclusion that perhaps this *was* the girl.

Dustin and Lucas trailed behind what remained of a red car to discuss the recent events, while Steve and Max trailed about looking for scraps they could set up a perimeter with.

Ringo, instead of helping, lay splayed out on the hood of another car, enjoying the temporary break as she soaked in the small bit of sun Hawkins was getting in the Fall season.

"Hey," Steve approached her, a sheet of scrap metal in hand, "why aren't you helping me? What are you- napping?"

"No, I am helping," she protested, sitting up onto her elbows, "I'm

visually scanning for points of entry."

"Behind your eyelids?" He drily responded.

"Look, I've had a rough day," she huffed, "you guys made me walk cross-country with a bucket of raw meat, give me *five* minutes."

"Fine," Steve sighed, shaking his head with amusement as he trailed toward the other two boys in their group, smacking the metal against the red car to startle them. He was much less kinder in his approach to them than he was with Ringo.

"Hey! Dickheads!" He shouted. "How come the only one helping me out is this random girl? We lose light in 40 minutes, lets go. Let's go!"

"Alright, asshole!"

"Okay, stupid!"

"Ringo!" Steve called out to her again, gesturing with his thumb for her to get up. "Haul ass!"

"Ugh," she grumbled, sliding her bottom down off of the hood and following after the group towards the bus.

Ringo was sure this was going to be an interesting night ahead, and thanked god she had Steve by her side so they could get through it together.

Hello again!

Ugh, writing this book feels so natural to me. I genuinely enjoy doing it. Sometimes when writing other fics I feel pressured or insecure about it but this book is just a breath of fresh air and it has been since the start. 30 chapters in, holy crap.

I hope you all have a happy New Year and that you enjoy this chapter, until next time!

candy95 - I'm so glad you like that they're being introduced! It's actually harder to write them into the plot than it is writing their

own subplot because I'm always trying to not make it a chapter where Ringo feels out of place and just offers a few lines of dialogue I'd like her to actually impact the story. Thanks so much and happy new year! x

Vince Basile Jr - Thank you! I loooove writing Ringo, Dustin and Steve together all they do is tease each other. I hope you liked this chapter!

- Ahhhhhh thank you so much! They're really dorky and cheesy and I don't even mind ahaha

Guest - Cute and dorky is literally Steve and Ringo, I'm so glad you like it!

NothingNooneZero - Omg okay so I read this review so many times after first seeing it, it's definitely the nicest, most encouraging review I have ever read on any of my fics. My number one goal with this story was to create a likeable and loveable OC that fits in and doesn't seem out of place and the fact you think that she actually belongs in the show is such an amazing compliment. There are times where I watch the show and I see a kind of gap where my head thinks Ringo should be. This book is going to the end don't worry, I love it too much to ever give up on it. Thank you so so much this means the absolute world to me. x

31. I Bless the Rains

THE GROUP WERE FLUTTERING AROUND THE LOT, completing the final tasks before the sun officially went down. Steve was in the midst of pouring gasoline around, the red-haired girl was salvaging through the materials laying around and Ringo was setting down traps.

Admittedly, bear traps frightened the hell out of her. But they seemed to work rather successfully last Halloween, and that was good enough for them. However fearful she was of getting caught in one, she was twice as scared as setting it, envisioning it going off at any moment.

They could only afford to buy three in the store, so she placed them in areas that weren't entirely visible from the windows on the bus.

"No sneak attacks today, Satan," she muttered under her breath, placing both feet down on the levers and shoving the giant claws open. Unaware that she hadn't placed them down far enough to click into place, when she stepped off it sprang up and snapped the thin air. The shock of it was enough to cause her to scream, her hands up in the air and flailing about until she calmed down and realised that none of her limbs had made contact with it.

"What?!" Steve bellowed, racing towards her while the other kids stood watch, fearfully. "What's wrong?!"

Embarrassed by her display, she huffed and shrugged her shoulders, keeping her head down as she returned towards Steve and the others.

"Nothing," she tried to play off. Steve rolled his eyes, while the kids let out a sigh of relief simultaneously.

"Jesus, Ringo," Steve swore, "I thought you were being mauled to death."

"Don't worry, sugar," she cooed teasingly, bumping the side of her hip against his, "I'll protect you from the monsters."

"Please," he scoffed, "I'll protect *you*."

"No," she continued to argue, prompting Dustin and Lucas to share a look of incredulity. *"I'll protect you."*

"No, Ringo, I'm the-" he cut himself off before continuing, looking away suddenly as he tossed the empty gas canister onto the ground.

"Finish that sentence, I dare you," she pointed at him, a smirk on her lips. "You were about to say because you're the *man*!"

"No! No!" He denied, looking guilty as charged. "I was about to say... because I'm the... Queen?"

"Nice save," she said sarcastically, chuckling to herself as they finally headed towards the bus to wait the night out.

She gripped her axe along the way, swinging it up to rest to rest on her shoulder as she stepped up onto the boarded up school bus. Max, Lucas and Dustin followed, whispering to themselves.

"Are they always like this?" Max asked quietly.

"Worse," Dustin huffed, "you should have seen them when they pretended they didn't like each other."

"I can hear you, dickhead," Steve called out in a deadpan voice.

Once the group were safely inside, Steve reached for the lever next to the driver's seat and shut the door to the bus, sealing them inside.

Ringo slid down onto the ground, placing the axe beside her and resting her back against the side of the bus. The kids circled around her, sitting down as well, while Steve stayed near the driver's seat, peering out. They began the wait for sundown.

"So," Ringo shimmied over to the new girl, who happened to be by her side. Max looked up, feeling shy all of a sudden as the girl regarded her. "What's your name?"

"Max," she responded tentatively. "Yours?"

"Ringo," she beamed, hoping it would somehow relax the younger girl.

"Nice name," she told her, and Ringo smiled even wider. Aside from Steve, she was the only person who hadn't immediately made the connection to a certain member of the Beatles.

"So, Max, you seem pretty cool. Why are you hanging with these losers?" She nodded her head towards Dustin and Lucas, who were pretending not to listen.

"Hey!" They shouted simultaneously.

"I'm new here, they followed me about until I felt bad and said I'd chill with them," Max joked, her lips finally forming the essence of a smile as Ringo giggled.

"New here, really? Where are you from?"

"California," she answered, and Ringo's head inconspicuously turned to make eye contact with Steve - who also whipped around at that revelation.

"Interesting," the blonde hummed, drawing her eyes away from Steve to return to the younger girl. "Got any siblings?"

"No," she shook her head. "Well, a step brother. You probably know him. Billy Hargrove?"

Ringo tried her hardest not to react, whether that reaction was to laugh or narrow her eyes she wasn't sure. In the meantime, Steve shuffled towards them and plopped down beside her.

"Yeah we know him," he muttered, trying to keep the distaste out of his voice.

"Yeah," Max nodded. "He's an asshole."

At this, the small amount of tension forming dissolved, and they all shared a laugh despite the current predicament they found themselves in.

Quite some time had passed, with each person taking it in shifts to climb the ladder above the bus and keep a look out. It was currently

Lucas' turn, who was adamant on not sharing his binoculars with anyone. As Ringo's turn was next, she threatened if he wouldn't give them to her he'd be covering her shift as well.

Steve was absently flicking his lighter on and off, staring off into the distance out of pure boredom. Ringo was curled beside him, her head against his shoulder as she used a stray rock to carve her name into the handle of her axe.

"So," Max began, trying to start conversation and ease their boredom, "you two really fought one of those things?"

"Yep," Steve admitted, while Ringo nodded with a tight smile. It wasn't one of her fondest memories.

"And you're like... totally 100% sure it wasn't a bear?"

"Damn, what kind of fucking bears are you seeing in California?" Ringo scoffed.

"Shit, don't be an idiot, okay?" Dustin cut in. "It wasn't a bear."

"Woah," Steve held his hands in the air at his outburst.

"Hey, don't call her an idiot!" Ringo called out, eyebrows furrowing. She didn't like the tone he was taking with the girl he obviously liked. But Dustin ignored them both.

"Why are you even here if you don't believe us?" He continued. "Just go home."

"Jeesh, someone's cranky," Max scoffed, getting up to gather her things. But Ringo could tell she was trying not to appear offended.

"Don't make me take off my belt, young man," she threatened, shuffling to stand onto her feet and giving him the harshest glare she could muster.

"Hey, come on, okay?" Steve sighed, trying to stop Max. "You can't go out there at night, alone. I'll give you a ride home when this is over."

She didn't answer him, instead climbing the ladder to go up and see

Lucas. When she disappeared, Steve gave him a look of disbelief.

"Damn, man, I don't think my advice told you to be an asshole."

"I don't even like her," Dustin huffed, continuing to pace around the bus impatiently. Assuming he was denying it because he thought Max was listening, Steve gave him a wink of encouragement.

"Why are you winking, Steve?" Dustin asked, prompting Steve to look away and shake his head innocently. "Stop."

"Jesus," Ringo laughed shortly. "It's past your bed time, pal. Why don't you take a nap in the corner and I'll wake you when it's over?"

"Shut up."

"Want Steve and I to sing you a lullaby?" She smirked at her proposed singing partner, who snickered at her jibes.

"I said, shut *up*."

"Oh come now, I know a good one," she shuffled toward him, leaning back against the wall of the bus and starting to sing, in a soft, slow voice, in a lullaby rendition of the original. *"Its gonna take a lot to drag me away from you... there's nothing that a hundred men or more could ever do..."*

Completely amused by how annoyed Dustin was becoming, Steve began to join in with a completely off-key, but quiet voice.

"I bless the rains down in Aaaafricaaaaa... gonna take some time to do the things we never haaaaad..."

"Oh my god!" He exploded, eyes wide with annoyance as he regarded upon the duo, who were now shamelessly laughing. "You know what, you guys are perfect together. You know why? Because you're both so *fucking annoying!*"

All of a sudden, a growl ripped through the field, causing all elements of anger or amusement to wipe from their faces. Steve, Dustin and Ringo rushed towards the caged windows, peering out through the slits in an attempt to see what was going on. Or more specifically,

where *it* was.

"You see him?" Steve questioned.

"No," Ringo answered in a whisper, heart hammering in her chest.

"Lucas!" Dustin called out. "What's going on?"

"I've got eyes!" Lucas shouted, "ten o'clock! Ten o'clock!"

Immediately, the trio's eyes snapped towards that general direction, and sure enough a dark mass could be made out from next to one of the cars. The figure was growling lowly, eyes fixed on the bus.

"There," Steve pointed his finger.

"What's he doing?" Dustin asked.

"I don't know. He's not taking the bait, why's he not taking the bait?"

"Maybe he's smarter than we think," Ringo revealed, eyes fixed in a mixture of adrenaline and fear.

"Or maybe he's not hungry?" Dustin added.

"Maybe... maybe he got sick of cow," Steve suggested, earning a smack in the chest from Ringo.

"Shut up, what the fuck? I don't wanna hear that!" She whispered. Soon after, Steve began to back up, a look of downtrodden realisation on his face. One that Ringo recognised all too well.

Her suspicions only became confirmed when he reached down for his bat, swinging it up and heading towards the front of the bus. Ringo and Dustin rose up simultaneously, looks of worry on their faces.

"Steve, don't even think about it," the blonde warned, stepping forward to follow him.

"Steve? What are you doing?" Dustin asked in a panic, but their protests were cut off as he flung the very same lighter he was playing with moments ago, in the air towards Ringo. Expertly, she caught it

in her hands, eyebrows furrowing in confusion.

"Just get ready," was all he said, reaching for the lever to open the door.

"This isn't the plan!" She protested, following after him with widened eyes, but as usual - he didn't listen. Sighing in frustration, all she could do was rush to the vacant door of the bus and watch out as he stepped into the clearing.

"Ringo, I have to close it!" Dustin told her, reaching for the handle and shutting it in front of her face.

"No!" She whisper shouted, shuffling towards the window instead to keep her eyes on him. Her axe was gripped tightly in her hands, and although it shook from how scared she was, she was fully prepared to run after him at a moment's notice.

Steve swung the bat cockily up, poised and ready to swing it if anything should lunge out at him. The creaking of the ladder sounded behind Ringo, but she didn't turn to see. He inched closer towards the car he knew the demo-dog would be hiding beside, whistling as if it were a regular dog.

"Come out, buddy," Steve taunted, two hands gripping the bat now as his hold became firmer.

"What's he doing?" Max demanded when she finally reached the bottom, flying toward the window to join Ringo and Dustin.

"Being an *idiot*," Ringo muttered, one hand lifting from her axe to slide her fingers onto the cage covering the window.

"Come on buddy, its dinner time," the boy outside continued, his feet practically disappearing within the smoke. "Human tastes better than cat, I promise."

"He's insane," Max commented, shaking her head.

"He's awesome," Dustin grinned, finding a new respect for the man he had unintentionally roped into all of this.

"Steve!" Lucas shouted all of a sudden. "Watch out!"

"Little busy here!" He hollered back.

"Three o clock! Three o clock!"

Like it was timed, Steve and the trio inside the bus turned their heads in synchronisation to see that, to their horror, their trail of bait hadn't just led Dart to them. They had just led a whole litter of the little demons, and they were all approaching Steve.

"Fuck this," Ringo swore, turning and sprinting towards the top of the bus again. She nearly broke the handle from how quick she opened the door, the large creaking noise distracting the demo-dogs from him for a second.

"Steve, abort!" Dustin was shouting, directly behind Ringo. "Abort!"

Steve took a quick glance around, realising that the situation was almost inescapable. He turned his head towards the first monster, who was now fully hurtling towards him. Involuntarily, his body froze in place, out of shock and a slight grasp of fear.

Just before it could make contact with his body, something broke within Steve, as he broke his limbs from their icy paralysis and leaped over the hood of the car next to him.

"Behind you!" Ringo screamed, unable to watch anymore as she leaped out of the bus, axe in hand and ready to offer assistance. Steve whirled around with his bat, hitting the incoming demo-dog in the head with a sickening crunch, and began to run towards the bus.

Another one lunged for Ringo, to which she responded to with a panicked kick to its head. Wading it off for a second, she swung her axe over her shoulder and brought it down onto its head, creating a fatal slice just behind its large mouth. The monster slumped to the ground just as Steve wrapped his hand around her elbow, dragging her to move in the opposite direction - back towards the bus.

"Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck-" she muttered to herself as they ran, half leaping at the group of kids to get inside the bus, with Steve right at her feet. Dustin caught her before she could fall, dragging her taller

figure backwards from the entrance so Steve could enter.

Just as the door shut, Steve plopped down onto the ground and grabbed the metal sheet placed next to the door, flinging the metal forward to press against it and holding it steady with his feet. Immediately, there was resistance, with the sounds of battering starting to come from all around the bus.

The creatures' limb made it over the sheet, eliciting a scream from all group members. Reacting instantly, Steve took his bat and began to beat at it - to harm it or get it away, he couldn't tell.

"The roof!" Ringo gasped in memory, rushing forward and swiping her foot underneath the ladder to disconnect it. The teenager quickly gripped one of the rungs and dragged it down, firing it onto the ground. Now that it was out of place, the roof would be able to close, but she wouldn't be able to reach it.

Desperately, she looked around for something to hoist herself up, and settled for one of the kids themselves.

"Stand there!" She grabbed the nearest person - which happened to be Lucas, and held her foot out to him. "Boost me up!"

"O-okay!" He agreed, cupping his hands underneath the sole of her foot just as she grabbed onto the railings above her head. With the extra lift, she was able to tug herself up to grab onto the top of the opening.

Truth be told, Ringo had the upper body strength of a dead fish. But with a burst of strength and energy from the adrenaline flooding her veins, she swung her foot up to rest on the railing she held moments before, and gripped the small, plastic door on the ceiling. With a final push of energy, she hauled it down to slam over the opening, prompting her to let go of everything in case she would slice her fingers off. With the lack of support, she fell straight down onto her bottom, causing her teeth to crack together and a sharp pain to radiate through that area of her body.

"Ow," she groaned, her body tilting to the side so her hands could cup both of her butt cheeks. A series of dull thuds began to sound out on

the ceiling, accompanied by slight indents made on the metal.

All heads looked up to follow the demo-dog that was advancing towards them - and that's when Ringo realised. She forgot about the other opening in the ceiling.

Max was the one who had been unfortunate enough to find herself directly underneath the opening, her head slowly tilting back as she looked up to see the very thing she had denied the existence of moments ago. Except this time - there could be no denying.

Her mouth opened to emit a loud shriek, while Ringo hissed in pain as she scrambled to grip onto one of the leftover bus seats, hauling herself onto her feet and grappling for her axe once again.

She shuffled towards the group, while Steve slid in past her, calling for the kids to move back as he held his bat up once again. Ringo joined him at his side, her axe poised and ready to swing. Its face opened out, a terrifying growl emitting from its throat as it prepared to dive headfirst into the bus.

Instead, something stranger happened.

As if it was called, the demo-dog turned and looked around, roaring into the night sky definitively before scurrying away from the bus. The group waited in silence, listening to the wails of the other creature that were seemingly responding too.

It appeared they all were leaving too, as their cries began to fade out the further away they got.

With a huff of relief, Ringo placed her hand against the wall, shaking her head as she took a deep breath, hoping the dull pain would fade too.

"Holy crap, my ass hurts," she muttered, leaning against the side of the bus.

"Are you alright?" Steve whispered, still holding the bat - just in case. Although his eyes darted between her and the opening, full of worry for both.

"Yeah I'm fine," she groaned, pushing herself off the wall as the group turned towards the front, ready to go out and investigate.

Steve joined Ringo at her side, gently placing his hand on her lower back protectively. She appreciated the gesture even if it only lasted for a second, as he dropped it so he could be the one to open the door first. Well, door was a stretch. All that was left was the metal sheet Steve had put in place.

Cautiously, he poked his head around it, stepping out when he realised it wasn't a trick - the coast truly was clear. Feeling as if she could finally breathe, Ringo followed him, welcoming the fresh air she hadn't been able to inhale the last time she was outside.

"What happened?" Lucas questioned.

"I don't know," Max murmured, looking shaken.

"Bonnie and Clyde over there scared them off?" Dustin suggested, but Steve simply shook his head, leaning his bloodied bat against his shoulder and even though the situation certainly didn't call for it, Ringo couldn't help but mentally remark on how handsome he truly was. Shaking her head from impure thoughts, she tried to refocus on the scenario they had found themselves in.

"No," he said, turning to face them all with a knowing glint in his eye, "they're going somewhere."

Happy new year everyone!

I really worry about Ringo feeling out of place in canon scenes like these, so I really hope that's not the case!

Thanks for reading as always, I hope you like this chapter x

- I'm so so glad you like the slight changes Ringo's presence makes to Steve's character! I panic in case people don't like the influence so I'm happy to hear that! There are parts in this chapter where he's different as well, like when Dustin is rude to Max and he doesn't approve like he did in the show. Ringo and Steve are definitely like parents ahah. I quite like the idea of Ringo and Max being friends, I

can't wait to write the rest of the season for their interactions! I definitely will continue season 2, I'm not too sure about season 3 but I'm debating a sequel for it. Honestly, Ringo and Steve are my favourite couple I'm writing and I don't think I can let them go. Thanks so much! Your review was sooo sweet to read! x

RedVelvetPanPan - Ahhhhh thank you so much! Steve and Dustin are my favourite too! Well I 'loked' reading this review aha, thank you!

candy95 - I'm so glad to hear that! They're the biggest dorks to be honest haha. Their relationship is like a balance of cheesiness and banter, I just love to write about it. I know right! Originally his advice to Dustin was after getting his heart broke by Nancy, so I thought it'd be more suited to change his advice depending on his current relationship status. Thanks as always, hope you liked this one xx

Court725 - It was something I was so worried about too! I'm so glad you don't think she was out of place or cramping their style, it was kind of a brotherly relationship between the two so I didn't want Ringo to ruin that dynamic. Thanks so much for commenting!

Vince Basile Jr - I think it was one of my favourite chapters too tbh! Awwww it makes me so happy that you love this story! Thank you and I hope you liked this one too!

32. The Queen Bee Nazi

RINGO WAS BEGINNING TO HATE THESE TRAIN TRACKS. She had spent the majority of her day walking along them, and now she would be spending the night as well. The only difference in the settings were that along with Steve and Dustin, came Lucas and Max.

Ringo shivered a little, from the previous scene or the cool, night air - she didn't know. After all, she had dressed for a 'casual date', not to hunt down monsters. She could only thank God that she had decided earlier to wear her Converse shoes instead of something uncomfortable.

Steve picked up on her shivering, hanging back so she could catch up to his side and walk together.

"You cold?" He asked, ready to take his jacket off.

"No," she denied, not wanting to be the girl that took the guy's jacket. She and Steve were one cliché away from being a horrible teen romance flick.

"Well, I doubt you have a motor neuron disease, so just take the damn jacket," he chuckled, giving his backpack to her so he could remove his jacket and hand it over to her. Once finished, he slipped his bag back onto his shoulders, now only covered by a thin sweater.

"Damn," she whistled, "next you'll be giving me a necklace with your initial on it."

Steve's eyes went wide while she wasn't looking, wondering how she knew exactly what he had planned on giving her for Christmas - a present he had planned already.

"Wow," he scoffed, "imagine I gave you something as *lame* as that. Hah! I would never."

"Well," she hummed, smirking at his deer-in-headlights expression, "as far as first dates go, you sure know how to make it unique."

"Tell me," he hung his free arm over her shoulder, a grin gracing his

lips, "do you kiss after the first date?"

"Oh my god," Lucas gagged from in front of them, himself and Max turning around with equal expressions of disgust, "can you *not* jump each other while we're here?"

Ringo childishly stuck her tongue out at him, to which he responded to by copying her action. With that distraction over with, Lucas could turn back to Dustin and continue their conversation.

"You're *sure* it was Dart?" He clarified.

"Yes," Dustin revealed, "he had the same exact yellow pattern on his butt."

"But he was *tiny* three days ago," Max interjected.

"He's molted three times already."

"MalTED?" Steve echoed.

"Like vinegar?" Ringo added in, trailing the tip of her axe lazily along the ground.

"*Molted*," the curly haired boy repeated. "He shed his skin to make room for growth, like hornworms. When he molts again soon, he'll be fully grown - or close to it. And so will his friends."

"Yeah, and he's gonna eat a lot more than just cats," Steve huffed, shining his flashlight around the tracks.

As her stomach rumbled, Ringo brought her backpack around to the front of her body, reaching in for a bag of chips after tucking the axe into a strap at the front. Immediately upon opening the bag, Steve dug his hand inside and took out a handful of chips, receiving a glare as a result.

"Wait-" Lucas stopped, taking Steve's words into account and reaching out to stop Dustin. "A cat? Dart ate a cat?"

"No, what? No!" Dustin stammered.

"What are you talking about?" Steve interrupted out of confusion, prompting Ringo to roll her eyes at his stupidity. "He ate Mews."

"Mews?" Max turned, "who's Mews?"

"Um?" Ringo tried to save him, her voice muffled with the food in her mouth. "It's a name we gave a dead rat... that we... fed him with. You know."

"No? When did that happen?" Steve furrowed his eyebrows. "It's Dustin's cat."

"Steve!" Dustin bellowed, while being shoved by Lucas.

"I knew it!" His friend was shouting, voice echoing through the trees. "You kept him!"

"No!"

"No?"

"No, I... No, I... he missed me. He wanted to come home."

"Bullshit!" Lucas scoffed.

"I didn't know he was a demogorgan, okay?" Dustin defended, his voice getting louder and louder.

"See what you did," Ringo teased Steve with a fake disappointed look, polishing off the rest of the bag of chips. "Fucking Yoko."

"*So did you!*" Dustin's roar brought their attention back to the group of pre-teens. "You told a stranger the truth!"

"Wh- a stranger?!" Max recanted angrily, stepping forward towards the argument.

"Jesus," Steve muttered to Ringo, "were we this dramatic?"

"Kids," Ringo called out in a bored tone, "there are people that are dying."

"Shut up, Ringo!" All three of them shouted back at her, causing her

hand to fly up to her chest in offence as they all turned back to arguing.

Steve snorted at her expression, "that's you told."

Unable to help herself, she chuckled along with him at the situation, grateful for the momentary reprieve from stress. Although a screech in the distance soon reminded them of what was going on.

Steve and Ringo met eyes with suspicious expressions, turning their heads back to the source of the sound and stepping forth to the tree line to investigate. Just in case, she tore her axe back from the strap it was held in and lifted it high.

"Hey guys?" Steve spoke hesitantly, a rustling sound further away stopping him and the blonde next to him in their tracks. "Guys!"

Their bickering stopped immediately from the volume of his tone, the newfound silence allowing them to hear the same animalistic screeching in the distance. All members in the group darted towards the tree line, tracking the sound while Max lingered behind.

"No, no, guys- why are you heading *towards* the sound?!" She demanded, staring incredulously. "Hello?!"

When no one answered her, she was left with no choice but to follow after them, or stay on the tracks by herself.

Their trail led them to a cliff edge, where they were given a bird's eye view of the forest and Hawkins. If it hadn't been for the eerie fog or the circumstances that led them to this point, Ringo would have thought it was a rather beautiful view.

The howling continued in the distance, too strange to be anything other than the demogorgans flocking together. Lucas brought his binoculars up to his eyes, peering through to investigate. His vision brought him to the lab, immediately drawing a conclusion.

"It's the lab," he deduced, lowering the looking device down to see with his own eyes. "They were going back home."

"Well," Ringo sighed, a chill running through her spine that prompted

her to grip the axe tighter, "I'm sure their mama will be happy to hear that."

"Seriously?" Jessica muttered to herself, placing the phone down for what was sure to be the seventh time. Either the phone lines in Hawkins were down this evening, or every one of her friends were ignoring her.

The only one to answer was the Wheeler household - Nancy's house, that is. Her mother had answered to say that Nancy was with Ringo, but her cousin's phone rang out as well. She had tried the Byers, only for the phone to ring out unanswered as well. Even more surprisingly, she lowered herself to calling *Steve*. And even *he* didn't answer.

Jessica would be lying if she said it didn't make her paranoid and insecure, after all, it wasn't often that she had more than one friend. As tough as she looked, she remained bothered by her inability to hold a group of friends longer than a few months. Usually they would tire of her, or continue to hang out without her until she got the message.

But this time was different. Ringo, Nancy and Jonathan weren't assholes. And as much as she called him one, she knew that Steve wasn't either. Not any more, anyway.

Something more strange was going on instead of her friends simply hanging out without her, she knew it in her heart.

So with a fire in her step and an anxious flutter in her chest, she set off driving towards each of her friends houses, determined to figure out what was going on.

The group had decided to wait at the gates of the lab, for what - they weren't sure. Hawkins Laboratory was a big place, and there was no chance in hell the group would just burst in, axes and bats blazing.

Suspiciously, when they finally reached the gates after the long trek down the mountain, the security guard was nowhere to be found,

leaving the gate completely open and unguarded.

"This doesn't look suspicious at all," Ringo hummed, stepping into the small security booth to investigate. There was no blood, or signs of an attack. It was as if he had simply vanished.

"Hey, a baby Ruth!" Steve exclaimed happily, reaching past her to pick up the chocolate bar from the desk.

"Seriously?" Ringo gave him a deadpan look. "What if it's owner is... you know..." she cupped her hand around her mouth to block the kids from hearing, "D-E-A-D."

"Wow!" Lucas muttered, "I wonder what does that spell! Dad?"

"Heh," Steve chuckled, ripping the packaging off and taking a large bite. "He called you dad."

"Shut up, *mom*," she teased, snatching the bar from his hand to take a bite of her own.

"Hey! What happened to it being wrong to steal from the dead?" He glared at her.

"This isn't stealing from the dead, this is stealing from you."

"Oh, I do hate when mom and dad fight," Lucas drily commented as he trailed around with boredom.

Ringo sighed as she handed Steve back his candy bar, leaning against the wall of the booth once more. She was jittery, constantly looking over her shoulder and expecting one of those *things* to be looking back at her.

"I would have shared it with you," Steve said upon noticing her suddenly saddened expression, "there's no need to be upset."

"What?" She replied with confusion, shaking her head when she realised what he was talking about. "Oh, no. I don't want the Baby Ruth."

"Then what's going on?" He pressed, giving her his full attention.

"I just think-" she cut off, noting the caring expression in her eyes that calmed her fears and caused her heart to swell. With that, she decided to keep her worries silent, for now. "I just think this place is giving me major Area 51 vibes and I'm ready to go down, Sigourney Weaver style."

"Go down?" He echoed, a suggestive smirk on his lips. She scoffed a laugh, smacking him on the chest and shaking her head.

Max perked up as her ears heard something in the distance, turning to face the gates with suspicious eyes. She wasn't yet sure if the screeching she heard was the squeals of a demogorgan or the wheels of a car.

"Guys?" She called out, not having to ponder for much longer as the sound of an engine met her ears, a set of headlights appearing at the end of the winding drive to the lab.

Ringo's head snapped up, fearing the worst and almost sighing in relief when she saw what Max had. One car became two, and the sound of an engine became the sound of a car horn honking furiously.

"Watch out!" Steve shouted, forcing them all to duck out of the path and onto the side of the road as the first car screeched past.

The next vehicle was a police department truck, and Ringo bit her lip fearfully at the sight of it. The thought of her mother being called to the station over her daughter loitering would put the fear of god into any person.

The truck stopped right beside them, the tension intensifying only to explode with relief as Chief Hopper lowered his window, jerking his head back as a gesture.

"Let's go!" He commanded. Lucas shot forward, gripping open the passenger side door, which they all had to climb through to get into the back. Steve and Ringo were the last to clamber inside, making sure the younger ones got in first.

With the three preteens in the back seat, there was nowhere for

Ringo to sit except for Steve's lap in the passenger seat. It was rather awkward, especially in front of a cop, but she'd rather sit on Steve than Dustin. Besides, Hopper's eyes were too focused on the road as he immediately set off, following the car in front.

A few moments passed, and he finally darted his eyes over to notice Ringo's position.

"Seriously? I'm still a cop, that's still a crime," he grumbled, receiving sheepish smiles from both teenagers.

"You're the famous Chief Hopper then?" Ringo rambled nervously. "It's nice to finally meet you. I mean, I'm glad we haven't met before now, because that would mean I would be getting arrested but, you know..."

He didn't answer her nor spare her a glance, his face still holding the same frown.

"It's not something I do often, get arrested I mean," she still continued on, a combination of nerves, stress and lack of sleep getting the better of her. "Only the once. But I wasn't properly arrested, the family didn't press charges."

"What the fuck?" Steve whispered, eyes wide as he regarded upon her.

"Oh yeah, I didn't tell you about that?" She fake smiled, acting innocent.

Their drive led them to the Byers household, the occupants in the first car soon revealing themselves as Jonathan, Nancy, Joyce and Mike piled out of the vehicle.

Seeing her two cousins and friend, Ringo barely waited until the car was fully stopped before launching herself out of the passenger seat, speed walking towards them.

"Nancy! Mike!" She called out, catching their attention as they watched on with worry as Jonathan and Joyce carried a body from the back seat. Ringo's step faltered at the sight of it, assuming the

worst, but she soon saw that it was Will and he appeared to be somewhat alive, if only unconscious.

"Ringo!" Nancy sighed in relief, darting towards her and wrapping her arms around the blonde in a hug which she eagerly accepted. "God, I'm glad to see you."

"I didn't know you were wrapped up in this, too," Ringo commented to Nancy, hugging her tightly in return before letting go to latch onto Mike, who was less willing for a hug.

"Gross," he deadpanned, although his words didn't have the same teasing undertone they always did. Ringo grabbed him by the shoulders and held him in front of her, inspecting him.

"I was wondering why you weren't with your band of geeks, are you okay?" She asked, but all he did was smack her hands off and mumble an 'I'm fine', before trailing after the others.

"Where did you think I was?" Nancy asked her when he left, walking by her side as they followed him indoors.

"I knew you were gonna sort out the... *Barbara* thing but you'd been gone a while, so I thought you and Jonathan were just banging it out," Ringo shrugged casually, her head snapping over after seeing Nancy suddenly looked as if she swallowed a bug.

"Oh my god," Ringo gasped, her eyes wide and her hand smacking over her mouth. It was just the two of them outside the door now. "You did it! You fucked Jonathan!"

"Not so loud!" She whisper-shouted, batting at her forearms with desperate eyes. "Gee, why don't you tell his mother too while you're at it!"

"Can I?" Ringo asked, an excited grin forming.

"No! Look," Nancy's tone turned serious, her eyes darting back to the house. "Something happened in the lab... there's more pressing things going on."

"What could be more pressing than Jonathan pressing his dick in

you?"

"Oh my god, Ringo!" She flew her hands up in frustration, her expression screwing up. "Be serious!"

"Alright, what's going on?" She stopped her chuckling, adopting a calmer expression in order to listen to Nancy. She knew when a situation called for her to pay attention.

Ringo immediately trailed toward Steve's side the second she entered the house, her face white as if she had just saw a ghost. She latched onto his hand, tucking it inconspicuously between them to hide their conjoined fingers.

"Hey? Are you okay? What's up?" He whispered to her, not wanting to interrupt Mike who was in the middle of talking about Bob Newby. Something that didn't seem so out of place now that she knew what happened.

"Nancy just explained what's going on," she shook her head, "before this seemed a bit surreal. But now... someone's *dead*, Steve. And Will is infected by those things and I just... we're not in Hawkins any more, Toto."

"Come on now," he angled his body to her, keeping his voice low but his expression sincere. "You don't need to worry. From what I've heard, Bob sacrificed himself. And they're trying to make Will better. It's all going to work out."

"I just... I try to brush everything off with a joke or act like I'm this badass but-" she cut off, masking her embarrassment at her confession by scraping a hand through her hair. "I'm scared. I'm scared for you, for the kids, for Jonathan, for Nancy - I don't want anything to happen to any of you."

"Nothing's going to happen," he soothed, resisting the urge to cup her cheek in front of everyone. "Not with an ass kicker like yourself looking after everyone."

She couldn't hold back the light chuckle that rose, easing away some of her worries.

"Besides," Steve gestured with his hand, "Chief Hopper isn't letting us leave. He said we're not going anywhere."

"What?" She frowned. "But we can't just stay here, we're involved now. We have to do something."

"I think this is bigger than us, Ringo," he disagreed. And that's when she saw it - he was a little scared too.

"What do you want to do, Mike?" Dustin's raised voice interrupted their private conversation, redirecting them back to the group of preteens. "The Chief's right on this. We can't stop the demodogs on our own."

"Demodogs?" Max echoed.

"Demogorgan... dogs... it's like a compound-" he made a gesture with his hands as if to bring the words together.

"Okay," Max cut him off and shut him down, prompting Steve and Ringo to wince. That one bound to hurt.

"She's right," Ringo added to the conversation, "Mike- you weren't there in the junkyard. We were this close to becoming something your dad would serve as dinner."

"When it was just Dart... maybe," Lucas shrugged. "But there's an army now."

"His army," Mike mumbled, his eyes downcast as he appeared to have a revelation of sorts.

"What do you mean?" Steve interjected.

"His army! Maybe if we can stop him, we can stop his army too!"

"Who's army?" Ringo screwed up her nose, feeling left out of the loop. Mike groaned in frustration before setting off towards the table, lifting one of the dozens of drawings that were scattered around the place. It seemed every time she came into this house it was serving a new form of decoration. From fairy lights and black painted letters, to drawings.

The drawing he showed the others was different from the rest, detailing a ground and sky and a giant, black spider-like creature encompassing all of it.

"The shadow monster!" Dustin exclaimed, catching on immediately while Ringo was still confused.

"It got Will that day on the field," Mike continued. "The doctor said it was like a virus, it infected him."

"Have I been in a coma?" Ringo whispered, absolutely baffled. She looked to Steve for an answer, but he appeared just as confused as she was.

"And so this virus, its connecting him to the tunnels?" Max caught on.

"What the fuck is going on?" Ringo muttered, leaning her bottom against the table. "I seriously need to start playing this Dungeons game."

"To the tunnels, to the creatures, to the upside down, everything!"

"Woah, woah," Steve gripped the sheet from his hands, wondering if it held the answer on it. "Slow down."

"Okay, look," Mike took a deep breath, ready to explain it fully to the older duo. It was as if the roles had been reversed, and with age *did not* come knowledge. "The shadow monster is inside everything. And if the vines feel something like pain, then so does Will."

"And so does Dart," Lucas added.

"Like what Mr Clarke taught us. The hive mind."

"The hive mind," Ringo repeated with a small smile, finally starting to recognise what he was talking about. Admittedly, she was a little more than proud of her moronic, stubborn cousin. He was truly intelligent with matters she'd never understand.

"The hive mind?" Steve echoed, still not in the loop.

"A collective consciousness," Dustin offered, "it's a super organism."

Steve looked as if he was about to have an aneurysm, so Ringo dumbed it down for him.

"Like bees following the queen bee," she explained, "and shit."

"And this is the thing that controls everything," Mike pointed to it. "It's the brain."

"The queen bee," Ringo corrected, receiving an eye roll.

"Yes, fine, the Queen bee or whatever."

"Like the mind flayer," Dustin gasped.

"No," Ringo screwed her eyes shut in frustration. "Enough with the game terminology."

"Get the book!" Dustin demanded, prompting Lucas to sprint towards the Byers bookshelf and whip out a large book. To some it would appear to be a textbook of sorts, but the title happened to be 'Dungeons and Dragons: The Complete Index.'

Ringo rubbed her temples as Dustin flipped through the pages, smacking his hands down when reaching the correct one.

"Nancy! Chief! I think they're onto something!" The blonde called down the hallway, watching as they shoved off from the wall outside Will's room and shared a glance before following down.

"The mind flayer," Dustin began - purely for Ringo, Steve, Nancy, Hopper and Max's benefit. The others were already well aware of what it was.

"What the hell is that?" Hopper remarked in a dry tone, with everyone gathered around the table to get a look of the page.

"It's a monster from an unknown dimension, it's so ancient that it doesn't even know it's true home. It enslaves races of other dimensions by taking over their brains using its highly-developed psionic powers."

The older people in the room glanced at Ringo for an explanation, for

she was the only one that didn't look bewildered and thus, had become a translator of sorts.

"Geek talk for the magical version of colonisation," she explained. Dustin opened his mouth to deny her, but upon thinking more, realised she wasn't exactly wrong.

"Oh my god, none of this is real, this is a kids game," Hopper huffed, the slight bit of hope he held visibly deflating.

"No, it's a manual. And it's not for kids. And unless you know something we don't, this is the best metaphor-" Dustin's passionate speech was cut off, not by Hopper, but by Lucas.

"Analogy," he corrected.

"Analogy... that's what you're worried about? *Fine*. An analogy, for understanding whatever the hell this is."

"Okay," Nancy finally bought into it, "so this mind flamer thing. What does it want?"

"*Flayer*. To conquer us, basically. It believes it's the master race."

"Oh my god," Ringo sighed, "this is karma for our ancestors guys. Jessica would have a *field* day if she was here."

"Or the Germans," Steve guessed. Ringo grimaced and leaned in to him when she noticed the looks he received.

"Babe, it's the Nazis," she whispered.

"Right, yeah, yeah, the Nazis," he gulped down the embarrassment.

Hello, hello!

This chapter kind of cuts off mid-scene, but I felt that was a good place to end it. It was running on really long and it's 4000 words, I don't want to cram everything into one chapter because there's really not that many scenes left for season 2 and I don't want this book to end soon!

*Thanks to everyone who read and/or reviewed the previous chapter
x*

*NothingNooneZero - Ahhhh this made me so happy! I don't think
YOU realise how much that means to me! I hope you continue to
enjoy it as much as you have so far! x*

*Vince Basile Jr - I'm really excited for the rest of season 2 as well,
though I think I'll have a couple sub-plot chapters in between
Halloween and the Snow Ball because I don't want to rush onward, I
love writing Steve and Ringo too much ahah*

*candy95 - As long as it's interesting that's all I want! This chapter
was a little more difficult because there's soooo much dialogue in
these scenes and once again I don't want to have Ringo out of place,
I hope you like it x*

*harleyquinn87 - Thanks so much for your comments! You're very
welcome, I loooove writing this story it's kind of relaxing aha. I
hope you enjoy this chapter xx*

33. Clo Segate

"WE ARE TALKING ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR WORLD AS WE KNOW IT," Lucas dramatically announced, sending the rest of the room that wasn't already aware of what a mind flayer was, into hysterics.

Nancy let out a sigh and shook her head, while Steve started anxiously scraping his hands through his hair and backing away from the table.

"That's great!" He remarked sarcastically, his head nodding frantically as it usually did when he became stressed, "that's great! That's really great!"

"Of course," Ringo rolled her eyes, crossing her arms over her chest with annoyance. "Finally meet a guy, and now the world's gonna end."

"Okay," Nancy shook her head, trying to refocus on the situation at hand and keep rational. Jonathan had just reentered the room, eyebrows furrowed with confusion at the book laid out on the table and the apparent meeting being held. "So if this thing is like a brain that's controlling everything, then if we kill it...?"

"We kill everything it controls," Mike answered for her, looking a little more positive than he had in days.

"We win," Dustin confirmed.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," Ringo interrupted, eyes glancing between the kids for an explanation. "If we kill the brain thing, and that will kill everything it controls, won't that kill Will?"

"Not unless it's a parasite," Steve voiced from a few feet away, starting to recover from his minor breakdown. "Because then... we would just be killing the parasite and not the host, right?"

Without missing a beat, every head in the room turned to look at Steve with mild confusion, staring blankly at him in wonder of how

he would come up with that conclusion.

"What?" He rolled his eyes, rejoining them by Ringo's side. "None of you are in Biology with me... it gets boring, I actually have to listen to the class."

"Great," Hopper stepped forward, all but pushing them aside to get a closer look at the Holy Grail of a book they recited from. "How do we kill this thing? Shoot it with fireballs or something?"

"N-no, no fireballs," Dustin nervously chuckled, knowing the real answer was something much more weird and would stop anyone over the age of thirteen listening. "Uh, you summon an undead army... because you know... zombies don't have brains, and the mind flayer it likes brains..."

With those words, all eager expressions in the room dropped. Whatever idea Dustin had been dangling in front of them had turned out to be nothing more than a fantasy.

"It's just a game," he shrugged, immediately receiving an eye roll and the smacking sound of the book slamming down from Hopper.

"What the hell are we doing here?" He grumbled.

"I thought we were waiting for your military backup," Dustin retorted with a sarcastic quirk of his brows.

"We are!"

"Look," Ringo stood up straight, her eyes boring into the Chief's in the hopes of getting him to listen. "This may have been some science fiction game-"

"RPG," Dustin corrected.

"Oh my god, shut up," she looked at him incredulously before turning back to Hopper. "But they may have been onto something. They're obviously all connected, but Will *isn't* one of those things. He's got one of those things *inside* him. Kill the host and hope that it kills the rest of them off."

When she finished, the entire room gave her a look similar to the one they gave Steve - full of disbelief and mild shock.

"Woah," Nancy whispered from beside her, sounding vaguely impressed.

"Hey, Daphne can be smart too," she bantered in return, confidently flicking her blonde hair over her shoulder.

"If that's the case, *how* would we even kill it? You can't just shoot it with guns," Mike argued, directing his frustration towards Hopper instead of his cousin.

"First of all, we don't know anything," he pointed at Ringo before turning his attention to Mike, "and second of all, you don't know that!"

"We know it's already killed everyone in that lab!"

"And we know the monsters are going to molt again!" Lucas added.

"And we know it's only a matter of time before those tunnels reach this town," Dustin voiced, all heads faced towards Hopper, searching for guidance in their time of darkness. Jonathan didn't speak once, something Nancy and Ringo didn't fail to notice. He wasn't the type of person to speak out often when in a crowd anyway, but this wasn't the same. He looked like he was about to completely give up.

"They're right," a new voice cut through the room, hoarse with stress and previously shed tears. Joyce Byers appeared in the doorway, looking worse for wear than her eldest son. A pang of sympathy shot through Ringo - not only had she just lost the man she loved, for all she knew - she was about to lose a son too.

"We have to kill it," she agreed, fists clenched by her sides. "I *want* to kill it."

"Me too, me too, okay Joyce?" Hopper approached her, voice audibly softer when speaking with her. If the circumstances were different, Steve and Ringo would have commented on a potential budding relationship. "But how do we do that? We don't exactly know what we're dealing with here."

"No," Mike interrupted, slowly stepping toward the bedroom where he knew Will was laying, "but he does. If anyone knows how to destroy this thing, it's Will. He connected to it, he'll know its weakness."

"I thought we couldn't trust him? That he's a spy for the mind flayer?" Max reminded him.

"Yeah, but he can't spy if he doesn't know where he is."

"How are you going to do that?" Steve questioned, confusedly looking at the younger boy. "Fill him with alcohol?"

Joyce and Hopper seemed to have a realisation of sorts, looking to each other with determination.

"The garden shed," she offered, the chief of police immediately nodding with agreement and rushing off towards the back door.

"You'd have been able to help with the alcohol thing," Steve teased into Ringo's ear, quietly - so no one else would hear. He didn't want to make light of the situation, but he also knew Ringo was panicking, and wanted to keep her from getting too wound up. "Because you never know where you are when you're drunk."

"Be that as it may," she whispered in return, following after everyone who approached the windows to look out, "I actually drink just to be able to put up with kissing you."

"Out of nervousness?" He smirked slyly.

"Out of disgust," she returned his grin, lightly smacking his cheek in playfulness.

Hopper's idea had led them to the garden shed, where everyone was tasked with covering up every distinguishable feature inside it. If it had been any other circumstance, everyone under the age of eighteen would complain about the workload. But Will's life was at stake, which was enough to cause everyone to take the job seriously.

Nancy tacked plastic bags onto the wall, Steve was using tape to

cover larger areas with sheets and Ringo was wrapping the support beam with wrapping paper leftover from last Christmas. While they did so, the kids scoured the house for anything else that could be used.

"So," Ringo sighed, breaking the silence as she wound the roll of paper around the beam, almost dizzying herself as she walked around the pole, "anyone else mentally freaking out?"

"Oh my god, yes," Nancy exhaled loudly, entire posture relaxing at the confirmation she wasn't the only one.

"Holy shit balls, I mean-" Steve's eyes widened, shaking his head lightly, "this is insane. This is *insane*. I feel like I'm in a horror movie."

"Well I'd hope not, pretty jocks tend to die first," Ringo grinned sarcastically, unrolling the cardboard sheet once it unveiled after she ran out of wrapping paper. She figured it could be spread out and tacked somewhere else.

"Aw," he waved his hand, pretending to be bashful, "you think I'm pretty?"

"You two are ridiculous," Nancy chuckled under her breath, their dynamic still something completely foreign to her.

"That ceiling is gonna need to be covered too," Ringo commented, her head tilting back as her gaze trailed over it. The roof was a dead giveaway - all Will would have to do was look up and know immediately where he was.

Rubbing the back of her forehead with her hand, she grabbed the ladder from next to Steve and settled it in the corner, ready to get to work on hiding the ceiling.

"So Nancy," Ringo began curiously, grabbing a spare staple gun and a mini-tarp as she ascended the ladder, "what happened with the... *thing*?"

"Thing?" Steve echoed, turning around with narrowed eyes. "What thing?"

"Nothing!" Nancy replied, her voice too high to believable.

"Something!" Ringo encouraged, knowing Steve wouldn't be put out by her decision to seek justice for Barb.

"I really don't think I should tell-" Nancy's eyes were desperately wide at Ringo, shaking her head quickly and making a cutting motion at her neck as a signal.

"Steve's not going to be mad, Nancy!" Ringo disputed. "I'll tell him if you want, it's no big deal!"

"Um... okay?" Nancy's expression screwed up awkwardly, taking a deep breath before continuing, "Jonathan and I had se-"

"Oh my god, no!" Ringo called out to interrupt her, holding back a bark of laughter. "Not that! The Barb thing!"

"Oh!" Nancy gasped, her free hand clapping over her mouth. Steve looked back and forth between both cousins, baffled by their interactions. He took a minute to think, the eventual look of realisation on his face was absolutely priceless.

Steve whipped around with an amused grin, pointing his finger accusingly at Nancy.

"You and Jonathan fucked!" He shouted, a little too loud, albeit. Immediately, Ringo and Nancy winced at his volume, hoping nobody inside heard.

"What?" A voice at the door cut through the small shed, the trio whipping around to see Jonathan standing with a dumbfounded expression.

"Oh, Jonathan!" Nancy gasped, her face flushing scarlet. Ringo and Steve made immediate eye contact, their postures stiffening at the sudden awkwardness.

"C-Can we just focus on saving Will, please?" He stammered, almost as red as Nancy was. If it hadn't been for the events of the day, he'd have been even more embarrassed than her. But he didn't have time to dwell, disappearing again after dropping a bundle of tinfoil onto

the ground.

Nancy looked as if she had swallowed a bug, turning back to complete the wall in total silence. Steve, feeling guilt over exposing their gossiping, placed a comforting, but awkward, hand on her shoulder.

"Um... don't worry about it... *champ*?" He grimaced at his words, deciding it was probably the wrong thing to say.

"'Champ', Steve?" Ringo repeated, a dry tone in her voice. "Really?"

"Well, what else can you say to your ex-girlfriend who reveals she's banging your friend?" He lifted his grip off to hold his hands up in defence, shuffling forward to lift a roll of tinfoil.

Ringo smiled slightly to herself at his use of the word 'friend'. Steve would never admit it, nor would Jonathan, but they weren't as distant from each other as they thought.

Waiting inside the house was more stressful than one would imagine, and thus, the occupants were forced to distract themselves. Mike, Joyce, Jonathan and Hopper had dragged Will to the shed for his interrogation. Dustin nervously paced past Ringo for the seventh time, who was currently shuffling through the cupboards for snacks. She ate when she was nervous.

"So Nancy, I didn't know you and Jonathan were a thing," Lucas called out with a smirk from his position on the ground, the girl in question's mouth falling open in shock.

"Hah!" Steve laughed, dropping his bat down to rest against the wall and leaning on the doorframe. "Classic."

"W-what?" Nancy sputtered, her eyes wide. "How do you know?"

"Everyone knows," Dustin rolled his eyes, leaning against the wall next to the window and keeping an eye out for movement. "We all heard Steve shouting."

"Thanks again, Ringo," Nancy smiled tightly.

"I did nothing," the blonde shrugged, breaking open a banana and dipping it into a jar of Nutella she found.

"God, how can you eat?" Max shook her head in disbelief, watching with narrowed eyes as the older girl took a bite of the banana.

"Easily?" Ringo answered, mimicking her facial expression.

Their chatter was disrupted by Hopper barging through the back door, practically diving for the bookcase and frantically flipping through each book until he found the one he was looking for.

"It's dotted decimal," he said with a rushed voice, as he scanned down the page, barely sparing Ringo a glance before calling to her in a shout. "Get pen and paper!"

"Ah! Okay!" Ringo shouted back, panicked by his tone. Quickly, she ripped open the drawer and whipped out a notepad and pen, tossing it towards the table for him to use. He began to sketch out a short series of dots and lines, before aligning it with the corresponding symbol in the book to get a letter.

"*H-E-R-E*," he read out, looking up for a moment before darting back towards the shed.

"What just happened?" Steve asked aloud, when all was silent for a minute. They all jumped when the next to burst inside was Jonathan, making a direct beeline for his bedroom. He pointedly didn't make eye contact with any of them; not even Nancy, who looked visibly wounded by that fact.

"He's just worried about Will, it's not personal," Ringo whispered to her, sidling up beside her and hooking their elbows together.

"I know, I know," Nancy waved off, but her expression was still tight nonetheless.

He barely looked at anyone when he returned either, his tape deck in hand and a determined expression on his face. Before reaching the handle of the back entrance, Jonathan whipped around and finally laid eyes on Nancy, his lips quirking up ever so slightly.

"Hopper is going to use the radio to relay dashes and dots that we get from Will, we need you guys to translate them into words. Okay?" He didn't wait for a response, all heads nodding in acceptance anyway and rushing to crowd around the table.

Lucas dived for the radio, which was already in the correct frequency, and ensured it was fully turned up. Ringo fetched another sheet of paper, handing it to Nancy to write with. Dustin and Max readied themselves with the book, prepared to translate at any minute. Steve looked like a fish out of water, unsure of how he could help but willing to offer his assistance nonetheless.

It was a couple of minutes before the first letter came through, which Dustin shouted across the table - a 'C'. Steve came around the table to stand next to Ringo, naturally gravitating towards her. She looked up upon sensing the presence beside her, a small smile rising on her lips before she returned her attention to Nancy's handwriting.

It took a while, but eventually a series of letters were wrote that could be made into two separate words.

"Clo Segate?" Steve read aloud, his eyebrows furrowed, "is that a name?"

"No, you dumb bitch, it says 'Close Gate'," Ringo screwed up her expression, biting back a laugh at his face of realisation. Nancy simply rolled her eyes, a sense of hope dawning on her. She didn't know what it meant, but it was possible Hopper and Joyce did.

Steve gestured for the walkie-talkie, ready to relay their findings to Hopper, but the shrill ring of the telephone cutting across the room froze the entire group mid-action.

Ringo was the first to respond, being the closest, all but leaping for the phone and lifting it off the hook.

"Not a good time!" She managed to make out, before slamming it down with a resounding click. It only took a second or two for the phone to ring once more, spurring a desperate response from Nancy as she ripped it off the wall and flung it across the ground.

The three teenagers met eyes, equal looks of horror and dread filled in each.

"Do you think he heard that?" Max asked, voicing everyone's thoughts.

"It's just a phone," Steve tried to play it down, "it could be anywhere, right?" Just on cue, a chorus of howls roared in the distance, dragging everyone's feet towards the nearest window to look out at the dark night.

"That's not good..." Dustin commented. His remark broke Steve and Ringo's temporary shock, forcing them to re-locate their weapons in the living room and start mentally preparing for what was sure to be a bloodbath.

Jonathan and Joyce smacked the door open, causing everyone to jump before they revealed themselves, carrying Will in their arms. Mike followed afterward, much to Nancy and Ringo's relief. Hopper's entrance was delayed for a few seconds, but when he appeared, he was carting two guns in tow - an assault rifle and a hunting rifle.

"Get away from the windows!" He barked at Max, Lucas and Dustin, prompting them to scamper away like scared mice. He reared around on a shaken Jonathan, who was growing paler by the second. "Do you know how to use this?"

"W-what?" Jonathan stammered with a gulp. The chief sighed and asked the next teenager close to him, which happened to be Steve.

"Can you use this?!"

"I'm- um- only at the fair!" He blurted, his nervousness increasing tenfold at Hopper's panicked tone. If the Chief of Police was scared, what chance did an assortment of kids and teenagers have?

"I can use it!" Nancy pushed through, catching the gun expertly after Hopper tossed it through the air. If they weren't about to look death in the eye, Ringo would have made a comment about girl power. But that was for another time.

The screeching in the distance closed in as they formed a defensive

barrier by the window, all those armed standing in front of the vulnerable kids behind them. Ringo's thumb rubbed over the engraving of her name she had carved the day before, as she poised her axe over her shoulder and mentally prepared for the worst.

The monsters were surely in the front garden now, if not seconds away from breaking in. A loud thudding noise sounded out, seemingly carrying the creature's howl around to the East side of the house.

"What are they doing?" Nancy panted, nearly out of breath from the anxious tightening in her chest. All occupants in the house were feeling the tension rise.

A snarling that caused Joyce to cry out reached the front window, causing them to whip back around to face the front again.

The animals groaned, almost as if they were in some sort of pain. Of course, they didn't shut down the possibility it was some sort of trap.

Without any preceding sign, one of the creatures suddenly exploded through the window, eliciting a scream from all those inside. It hurtled through the air straight for Ringo, who's reflexes caused her to swing out and slice her axe into the neck of the thing, dropping it to the ground. With one eye on the now open window, the group watched tentatively as Ringo placed her Converse-covered shoe against the carcass and whipped her axe out of its neck.

"Is it dead?" Mike questioned, while Ringo stayed next to it, tilting her head in inspection.

"I think it already was..." she answered, looking back at the others with a curious expression, one which quickly fell at the sound of the wooden planks in the porch beginning to creak.

The group watched in equal parts horror to amazement as the lock to the door, and subsequently the latch too, began to open. No matter how much the others feared what was on the other side, Ringo knew this couldn't have been the creatures. They couldn't unlock and open doors telepathically. In fact, there was only one person she knew of that could do that.

Ringo lowered her axe as the theory came to her mind, while everyone else tightened their grip upon the opening of the door. But their hands soon fell as slack as their jaws after they saw the entrant.

The blonde had seen the little girl once in her entire life, but their meeting had been such a prolific one there was no forgetting her appearance. Her hair was slightly longer now, slicked back behind her ears. Her outfit surely differed from Mike's clean clothes, and her appearance had dramatically changed. But there was no doubting it.

This was Eleven.

While everyone's gazes didn't stray from her, Ringo's fell to Mike, her heart warming as he stepped forward from the group. He looked as if he were about to break down there and then. She didn't know much about love, although she believed she saw a glimmer of it in her relationship with Steve. Whether they had made it official yet or not. Despite their ages, no one in the room could doubt that the four letter word described Mike and Eleven. It didn't even have to mean in a strictly romantic sense, for they surely loved each other as friends, nonetheless.

Hello again! I'm not as happy with this chapter as I normally am, it's hard to add in Steve and Ringo when there's so much going on so they didn't have many moments together but it should be back to normal when they become babysitting parents.

I hope everyone likes this chapter! See you soon!

RedVelvetPanPan - I'm glad you do! Some people don't like dry, sarcastic humour

- Awww you're so sweet! Ringo's character development is whats pushing me to do a sequel because I feel like she's come so far but she still has a long way to go!

candy95 - Thank you! Jessica will be coming up in the next chapter and you'll see how she fits in!

Vince Basile Jr - Thank you so much! You're so kind as always, I

hope you like this chapter too!

harleyquinn87 - Awww thank you for your continued support! It helps me so much with writing! x

Court725 - I LIVE for Ringo teasing Nancy and Jonathan there's so much more to come from that ahah, thank you so much! xx

34. Burn It Out

AFTER A TOUCHING REUNION AND A SHOCKING REVELATION THAT ELEVEN HAD BEEN HARBOURED BY CHIEF HOPPER, Mike was hysterical. Any pent up emotion he had suppressed over a year after his separation from Eleven rose to the surface, and aimed directly at Hopper. The Chief dragged the pre-teen into the bedroom, eager to keep him away from the others eyes and explain to him why he did what he did.

This left Eleven alone with the others, being immediately attacked by Lucas and Dustin.

"Is that the psychic chick?" Steve leaned in and whispered to Ringo, who screwed up her expression.

"She's not psychic," she denied, eyebrows furrowing as she tried to find a word to explain what exactly Eleven *was*, "she's... special."

Their attention was brought back to the group of kids as Max called out to the other girl, walking toward her with a shy smile. Nancy and Ringo watched in confusion as the girl simply stormed past her with a harsh glare, obviously taking a dislike to her already, and headed straight into Joyce's arms.

"What was that about?" Steve pressed, letting out a low whistle.

"It's so sad," Ringo mused, a hand clasped over her chest, "the patriarchal pressures of society have reached her already."

"We'll need to talk to her when this is all over," Nancy nodded in agreement, "girls need to support other girls."

"What?" Steve recoiled, baffled by their ramblings.

"Psst," Ringo hissed at Max, who was currently staring at her shoes, visibly deflated and offended. Her eyes lifted up to the blonde, who cocked her head in a gesture to come over.

"Well," Max raised her eyebrows when she reached the teenagers, "that was embarrassing."

"Don't take it personal, kid," Ringo comforted her, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. "Eleven is used to being the only girl in that group, she's just scared she'll be replaced by the new girl."

"You got all that from a *look*?" Steve retorted disbelievingly.

"She just sounds really cool," Max shrugged, her eyes following Eleven as she walked with Joyce towards Will's bedroom. "I was the one that was jealous of the guys for getting to be friends with her."

"It's not your fault," Nancy added with a soft smile, contrasting her appearance as Hopper's hunting rifle was still held against her body.

"It's *society's* fault," Ringo offered, eliciting an amused eye roll from the ginger girl.

"Can you *believe* Eleven is back?" Dustin called out excitedly to their group, pacing over and eyeing the arm Ringo held around Max. "Hey, Eleven looked at me weirdly when I purred. Do I get comforted too?"

"No, you brought that on yourself for being weird."

"*Burn*," Steve snickered from beside her, receiving an evil glare from the boy in question.

"I can't believe Hopper kept her from us," Dustin commented bitterly, looking towards the door he was behind with narrowed eyes.

"It makes sense, doesn't it?" Nancy disputed. "None of us were allowed to even talk about what happened, imagine what they'd have done to her if they found her alive."

"She'd end up looking like Mews," Steve suggested, receiving a scoff and an even harsher glare from Dustin.

Jessica's expression immediately frowned upon noticing the car in the driveway of the Wheeler household.

After having little luck checking Ringo's apartment, and being told by Julia that her so-called 'prodigal daughter' was with Nancy, she turned around and headed for the latter's house. What she didn't

expect to see was Billy Hargrove, shirtless underneath a leather jackass - like only a true asshole would wear, Jessica thought.

He was walking away from the front door, heading towards his car with a smirk that looked like the cat who got the cream. Jessica's eyes followed back to see Nancy's mother staring provocatively from the doorstep, her hip jutted out and scantily clad in a silk robe.

"If you're looking for anyone in our age group, they ain't here, Richards," Billy called out to the dark haired girl upon noticing her, still stopped at the top of the lawn.

"What are *you* doing here, Hargrove?" She narrowed her eyes protectively, arms crossing over her chest.

"Looking for Max, you seen her?" He raised an eyebrow, stepping toward her and stopping when he was a few feet away. Billy's eyes scraped up and down her body, but Jessica got the sense he did it to annoy her more than anything else.

"No, I haven't," Jessica shrugged, turning around fully to return to her car.

"Then do you know where those loser kids hang out?"

"They're not losers," she whipped around with a bored look, "if anyone's the loser it's you. You're so cliché, you're a blink away from being cast by John Hughes as a teen flick villain."

"Oh, really?" His smirk widened into a grin as he closed the distance between them. "Wanna be the good girl that makes me realise my terrible ways?"

"No, I want you to step the fuck back from me before I whip out my pepper spray."

"Look," he rolled his eyes, dropping the facade, "I don't have time to argue with you. Tell me where the hell she could be."

"I'm not about to rat out a girl that's hiding from you," Jessica scoffed, opening her car door and turning back once more before fully stepping inside. "I think I'll even ask her for tips for getting away

from you."

"Hilarious," he nodded, nostrils flaring as his temper rose. Billy stood still on the lawn, hands on his hips as he watched Jessica take off down the street. An idea came to him suddenly, that sent him jogging back to his own car and keeping an eye on the direction she was heading. Mrs Wheeler had shown him directions towards Dustin Henderson's house, but something told him that Jessica was headed in just the right direction.

"It's not like it was before, it's grown... a lot," Hopper was announcing to the group, all crowded round the table for their debrief. "And that's assuming we can get in, the place is crawling with those dogs."

"Demo-dogs," Dustin interrupted, causing the rest of the group to either roll their eyes or huff. "Like demogorgan and dog... so when you put them together it sounds pretty badass-"

"How is this important right now?" Hopper cut him off, his voice raising higher in frustration.

"Chill out," Ringo frowned at his tone while Dustin turned away. "He's just a kid."

"Thanks, babe," Dustin nodded at her, the corners of his lips lifting up while she simply shook her head.

"I can do it," Eleven revealed, a determined look crossing her expression.

"You're not hearing me," Hopper refused stubbornly.

"I am hearing you," she persisted, "I can do it."

"Even if El can, there's still another problem," Mike added, "we don't know if Steve's right. Maybe if we close the gate and kill the mind flayer, it'll kill Will. Can we really risk that?"

Inadvertently, everyone's eyes flitted to Joyce for her reaction, but she appeared to be deep in thought.

"He likes it cold," she said suddenly, nodding her head as a realisation overcame her. "That's what he said to me, he likes it cold. We keep giving it what it wants!"

"If this is a virus, and Will's the host..." Nancy began.

"Then we need to make the host uninhabitable," Jonathan finished for her.

"Like a fever," Steve called out, receiving the attention of all in the room, who gave him a similar wary gaze like before. "You know - like how our bodies give us a fever to kill off the bacteria or whatever." The gazes continued, causing him to awkwardly shrug. "I told you, biology class."

"We need to burn it out of him," Joyce announced, fists balled by her side with determination.

Hopper apparently had the perfect place in mind, quickly relaying its location to Joyce and Jonathan as he hurtled forward to lift Will from the bed. The trio, and an unconscious Will, left in a flurry towards the front door, expecting that at least one of the teenagers left behind would be capable of babysitting the rest. Hopper left them with nothing but the command of fetching heating devices for Will.

Ringo, Steve and Nancy trailed out to the rubbish heap in Joyce's back yard, hearing that there were disposed radiators and such left out there.

"Damn," Ringo grimaced as she began to sift through the junk, "I love Joyce, but who the hell keeps a whole pile of crap in their back yard?"

"Ringo, be respectful!" Nancy demanded.

"You should go with him," Steve called out to her, shining his flashlight over a pair of discarded fairy lights.

"What?" She asked, confused.

"You should go with Jonathan," Steve repeated.

"I agree," Ringo nodded. "Maybe the mere sight of you will be a source of comfort, as he remembers the *wild* night where-"

"Oh my god, shut up," Nancy rolled her eyes, cheeks threatening to blush at any minute. "And besides, I can't leave Mike."

"No ones leaving anyone," Steve disagreed, reaching in and dragging a discarded portable heater out, inspecting it for damage. "Turns out Ringo and I are pretty damn good babysitters."

"It's true," Ringo nodded, screwing up her nose at the dirt that transferred onto her hands. "I'm now much less concerned if I end up with a teen pregnancy. I mean, it may ruin my career and life prospects, but at least I'll not, I dunno, drop it or something."

"Or," Steve held a finger up, "we could just not get you pregnant?"

"You guys are ridiculous," Nancy rolled her eyes, repeating something she had said a thousand times before. "But I love it. I wish I had what you two have. It's... special."

Steve and Ringo shared a glance, sizing each other up a little.

"Nah," Steve shook his head, "she's a loud eater."

"Sometimes he makes fart noises with his armpits and it's never made me laugh but he continues to do it," Ringo fired back, placing one hand on her hip.

"I've seen her snort water through her nose!"

"Well I'm not even his girlfriend so!" Ringo called back, regretting it immediately. She had just unintentionally brought attention to something that they had been avoiding for a while - whether or not they were official.

Steve swallowed at her words, dropping his gaze before returning to Nancy with a casual smile.

"You can have all that with Jonathan, but you two have got to stop prancing around pretending there's nothing there," he told her honestly.

"Yeah," Ringo agreed, dragging an old gas heater from the mound. "This whole 'we don't like each other, gross' thing is driving me around the bend."

"Okay," she sighed, seemingly accepting their words instead of arguing back like she usually did. Nancy's eyes cast back to the direction of Jonathan's car, her teeth nibbling her lower lip. "Okay."

"You know, you could help!" Steve called out at Ringo, who sat on the kitchen counter watching like a spectator as Dustin emptied the fridge. The demodog that was sent flailing through the window was wrapped up in Steve's arms in a blanket, prompted by Dustin who wanted the creature to be kept preserved.

"You look like you've got it covered," Ringo retorted, watching as strings of spit drained from its mouth onto the ground, just missing his sleeve.

"All right!" Dustin called as he dragged the last shelf of food out onto the ground, "it should fit now!"

"Is this really necessary?" Steve asked, panting slightly with the weight of the monster.

"Yes it is!" Dustin shouted, clearly offended by his lack of faith. "This is a groundbreaking scientific discovery, okay? We can't just bury it like some common mammal, it's not a dog!"

"All right, all right," Steve huffed, shuffling forward and bending the creature to get it ready for storage. "But you're explaining this to Mrs Byers, all right?"

"Don't forget to lift with your knees!" Ringo called out encouragingly. "Don't pull your back, now!"

"Goddamn it, I have to do everything in this house," he muttered, shoving the demodog against the open fridge and trying desperately to heave it inside. But it was simply too large to fit. "Christ, help me out!"

"What am I supposed to do?" Dustin responded with an attitude.

"Get the door man, just get the door."

With extra exertion, and no help at all from Ringo, they managed to squeeze the thing inside of the fridge until the door shut, leaning against it afterward and panting breathlessly.

"Oh shoot, did you take the peanut butter out of the fridge door before you did that?" Ringo announced teasingly, receiving a death glare as a result.

"I'm not opening that door," Steve replied, grabbing for a tea towel to wipe his slime-covered hands with.

"I was kidding," she smirked, watching his movements. "I hope you don't think you're touching me again with those demo-hands."

"Oh, as if that would stop you," he grinned suddenly, flying toward her quickly before she could escape and running his slick hands up and down her bare arms.

"Steve!" She shouted, batting at his hands to get him away. "You sicko! Get off!"

"But I am getting it off my hands, Ringo!" He laughed loudly, following after her when she propelled herself off the counter in a bid for escape. Steve wrapped his arms around her middle from behind, lifting her slightly into the air.

Ringo squealed with shock and amusement, struggling in his grip but laughing too hard to make a viable attempt at escape.

Their struggle brought them towards the living room, where their eyes were immediately drawn to a glum looking Mike, who was cleaning up some shattered glass. Straight away, all essence of amusement drained from their faces as they were reminded of how serious the situation was. For all Mike could have known, that may have been his last time seeing Eleven again.

"Alright, *mom*," Ringo murmured to Steve as he set her feet down on the ground once again. "Let's get to work."

Howdy ho, back at it again with my favourite mom and dad.

I changed the part in the canon where Billy gets directions to Will's house and changed it to Dustin's instead, to better fit Jessica into the narrative, I'm quite proud of this chapter it's more focused on Ringo and Steve instead of the canon events

I hope everyone likes this chapter!

candy95 - I'm glad you think I capture his personality well! He is a genuinely funny character and I love focusing on his little comments I imagine him making while everything else is going on. Hope you enjoy what's to come!

- Ahhhh I'm so happy you like Jessica too! I love their little group of friends so much, it doesn't seem right to exclude her from all the action! Thank you so much, I hope you have a lovely day x

Vince Basile Jr - Thank you as always! I hope you liked this one and what's to come, I can't wait for the babysitting scenes coming up!

35. Honey, I'm Home

THE GROUP WAS MORE DISPERSED THAN EVER, but Ringo didn't fail to see how close Lucas and Max stayed together. They had both taken on the responsibility of cleaning broken glass. Ringo sat at the table, watching them with a smirk on her face. She could tell they liked each other, the way they naturally gravitated together. However she also knew of Dustin's feelings, and hoped he wasn't too attached to the redhead.

With her smirk remaining, her fingers lazily dragged through her blonde locks as she began to braid them, her mouth opening to lowly sing lyrics she felt pertained to the situation.

"*Young loooooove*," she sang, low enough to appear casual but audible for them still to hear, "*first loooooove...*"

The kids gave her a weird look, as she swayed to side to side with a knowing glint to her eye. Steve covered his hand over his mouth to muffle his laughs, shaking his head with ridiculousness at her lack of subtlety.

Mike was pacing the floor with a worried expression, the only one not to react to her sudden outburst of song. He was too enveloped in his own thoughts and concerns to pay them any attention. Ringo was concerned for him, feeling as if she had stepped into his sister's shoes with Nancy's absence. But she also knew her cousin well, and knew he needed to be left alone. Mike tended to snap at people when he was stressed.

"Mike, will you just stop already?" Lucas voiced, stopping from sweeping to voice what everyone was thinking.

"You weren't there, okay?" He whipped around, sounding as stressed as he looked. "That lab is *swarming* with hundreds of those dogs."

"Demodogs," Dustin reminded him, receiving a glare.

"Goddamn, kid," Ringo huffed, throwing her gaze towards the ceiling in an eye roll and shaking her hair out of the plaits. "You're like a

broken record. Change the damn tune."

"The chief will take care of her!" Lucas reminded him, stopping Mike from snapping at Dustin.

"Like she needs protection," Max scoffed, obviously still bitter from their earlier altercation as she swept glass shards into a dustpan.

"Listen, dude," Steve began, stepping in to diffuse the situation and looking incredibly domestic with a towel in his hand. "If the coach calls a play in the game, bottom line is you execute it, alright?"

"Oh boy," Ringo muttered to herself, knowing full well football was the last analogy to use to get *these* kids to listen.

"First of all," Mike whipped around, "this isn't some stupid sports game. And second, we're not even in the game. We're on the bench."

Steve threw a glance over his shoulder at Ringo, eyes widened in mild surprise.

"Damn, is that where you get your attitude?" He commented, turning back to Mike and beginning to stammer as he came up with a response. "Right, so my point is..."

"Useless players get put on the bench?" Ringo finished for him.

"No!" He scoffed. "My point is... okay, we're put on the bench and there's nothing we can do."

"That's not *entirely* true," Dustin started, receiving a huff from every person present as he formulated another far-fetched thought. "These demodogs have a hive mind. When they ran away from the bus, they got called away."

"So if we get their attention, maybe we can draw them away from the lab," Max speculated.

"And clear a path to the gate," Mike continued after her, eyes fixed to the ground as the idea sunk in.

Steve's eyes widened and his mouth dropped, looking back at Ringo

with an incredulous look but she simply avoided his gaze and scratched the back of her neck. The idea wasn't *that* left-field, if only they could find a way to drag their attention away that didn't involve becoming the *object* of their attention.

"Yeah!" Steve spluttered, smacking the tea towel against his leg as he brought his hands down. "And then we *all* die!"

"Well that's one point of view," Dustin shrugged.

"That's not a point of view man, that's a fact."

"I got it!" Mike exclaimed suddenly, darting off towards the hallway next to the kitchen and crouching down to point at one of the taped drawings. "This is where the Chief dug his hole, this is our way into the tunnel. So..."

He took off again, this time towards the living room where a mass of drawings seemed to cluster together at a meeting point.

"This is like a hub! Maybe if we can set this on fire-"

"Oh, yeah?" Steve called out sarcastically. "That's a no!"

Ringo tilted her head as followed from the entry point drawing towards the hub, mentally debating their chances of survival and trying to decipher the length of their travel. Admittedly, she felt just as useless as the other kids did, she wasn't meant to just stand on the sidelines.

"The mind flayer would call away his army and they'd all come to stop us," Dustin added, as if it was a normal thing.

"Wait, what?" Ringo reeled back. "We can't fight an *army*! All we have between us is a bat, an axe and several kids we temporarily fostered. And no offence, you're all dead weight!"

"Hey!" Steve called out to them, his voice falling on deaf ears.

"Then we circle back to the exit," Mike offered to the kids excitedly huddled together, raising Ringo's eyebrows in thought.

"Guys-"

"By the time they realise we're gone, El would be at the gate!"

"Hey! Hey! Hey!" Steve was shouting, clapping his hands frantically to get their attention. Ringo stayed pointedly silent, mulling over their plan and wondering if she should voice that it didn't sound like the worst.

Steve tossed his now infamous towel over his shoulder, placing his hands on his hips and giving each kid a pointed look.

"This is not happening," he demanded, raising an eyebrow and daring one of them to argue that fact.

"Why not?!" Dustin retorted, nose scrunched up with annoyance.

"Ringo, can you speak to these kids, please? They're not listening to me!"

On cue, all eyes turned to the blonde, who was leaning against the wall with a rather unphased expression. She awkwardly screwed up her face, hands clasped together and raising her shoulders up.

"I mean... the kids wanna go help their friend, Steve," she tried to reason, taking their side somewhat.

"You're no help!" He pointed at her frustratedly, before returning his glare to the pre-teens. "It's not happening! I promised to keep you shitheads safe, and that's exactly what I plan on doing. We're staying here - on the bench, and we're waiting for the starting team to do their job. Does everybody understand?"

"But *Ringo* said-" Lucas began, gesturing wildly at the blonde who tried to stay out of Steve's line of fire.

"If *Ringo* told you to jump off a bridge, would you do it?" He questioned, his tone still as high-strung.

"Fuck yeah," Dustin answered, grinning cheekily at her and forcing her to bite back a laugh.

"This isn't a stupid sports game, then!" Mike spat out stubbornly, prompting Steve to take his towel and shake it at the black haired boy.

"I *said* does everybody understand that? I need a yes."

They didn't answer, instead rolling their eyes and dispersing once more. Their lips whispered comments about their seemingly newfound adoptive mother, but Steve didn't care as long as they listened to him.

"Damn," Ringo murmured, sidling up against him and waggling her eyebrows suggestively. "I like it when you take control. Why don't you keep that dishcloth for later?"

"You're no help whatsoever," he continued, shaking his head and crossing his arms over his chest. "It's like I have to do everything myself."

"Awe, I'm sorry," she jutted her lower lip out, wrapping her arms around him from the side and resting her chin on his shoulder. "You wanna go into the bathroom and make out?"

"No," he sighed, looking exhausted. "We're not going into the bathroom to make out, we have *obligations*."

Disrupting Ringo's advances was the shining of headlights through the window. Sharing a panicked gaze, the teenagers rushed forward towards the curtains, peeling them back and peering outside to see who had come to visit them.

"*Fuck*," Ringo and Steve muttered simultaneously at the sight of Jessica's car, the owner itself currently putting the car into park and exiting through the driver's door.

"You're gonna have to go out there," Steve told her, stepping back from the window. "She can't come in here, the place is a mess."

"What am I supposed to tell her?" Ringo answered, her voice high-pitched in panic.

"Tell her... we're having a party?"

"That we *didn't* invite her to? Gee, that'll go down well!"

"Make up something, I don't know!"

Grumbling, Ringo darted for the front door, stepping outside onto the porch before she could knock on the wood. Jessica gasped in surprise and stepped back as she suddenly appeared, eyes narrowing in confusion.

"Uh- hey?" She started awkwardly with a short laugh.

"Hey!" Ringo responded, too quickly and too loud. Everything about her screamed suspicious, and Jessica was far too intelligent to look past it.

"What's going on? I've been looking for you guys?" She told her, a sense of vulnerability in her voice that made Ringo's heart clench in guilt.

"It's uh... *Dallas* night. It's Jonathan and I's guilty pleasure," she threw in a giggle for good measure, "don't tell anyone."

"I thought *Dallas* was on Sunday?" Jessica raised her eyebrows disbelievingly.

"It's a repeat, we missed the last one."

"Oh," she opened her mouth in an o-shape, gaze trailing between Ringo and the broken window. "Is that why Steve and the kids are here too then?"

Ringo's brows furrowed, leaning forward to follow her gaze and frowning when she saw Steve and the kids were peering out the broken glass, entirely obvious. When they saw that she had caught them, they flew backward out of sight, only serving to make them look more suspicious.

"Really?" Jessica asked drily, shaking her head and turning to storm back to her car.

"No, Jessica wait!" Ringo called out, rushing to follow after her. But Jessica, given a head-start, climbed inside of her car and started up

the engine. She peeled out of the driveway with a slight screeching noise, but Ringo was determined - and rushed to follow after the car.

Jessica swallowed back tears of anger, hating how she knew this was going to happen. Just like it always did. Her friends would grow tired of her personality, irritated with her presence and eventually just hang out without her altogether. She should have known better.

A knock at her window startled her, turning her head to see the blonde sprinting at the side of the car to stay up to speed as they reached the main road. Jessica frowned in disbelief, scoffing lowly and pointedly starting to rev her engine faster.

"I haven't run... this fast... since there was a rat in my trailer," Ringo shouted, voice muffled through the window. Her cheeks were flaming red already, a clear sign of her unfitness. When Jessica began to pick up speed, she fell considerably behind, having to stop altogether to catch her breath.

"Damnit!" Ringo cursed, leaning her hands against her knees and taking deep, shaky breaths. The light sound of brakes squealing sounded up ahead, prompting her to lift her head and sigh at relief at the sight of Jessica's car stopped fully.

Wasting no time before Jessica changed her mind, Ringo jogged towards it and grappled for the passenger side door, shuffling inside the car where she was met with a frosty reception.

"What do you *want*?" Jessica hissed, avoiding her eyes and keeping focused on the road ahead.

"I-I want... to... explain," Ringo said, still panting heavily and clutching her chest to calm her erratic breathing.

"There's nothing to explain," Jessica shrugged. "I don't care."

"Yes, you do! W-... we weren't hanging out without... you - oh my god, I think I'm having a heart attack," Ringo took a few more deep breaths, while Jessica simply rolled her eyes in annoyance, still hurt by the whole situation.

"We weren't hanging out without you," Ringo repeated when she

could finally adjust her breaths. "Look, something's going on and I can't tell you what it is, but you just have to trust me when I say that if I could tell you, I would. You don't want to be involved with this."

"You expect me to believe that?" She finally looked at her, expression cold but her eyes clearly saddened. A car drove slowly past them, but Ringo didn't look, determined to keep her attention on her friend. Surely the car wasn't turning into the Byers, anyway.

"I know it's a big ask," Ringo conceded. "But I swear to you, there's some bad shit going on. It started last Halloween, it's the reason behind everything with Barb and with Will's disappearance... just trust me, please?"

"You can't involve me, but you'll involve a bunch of twelve year olds? Bullshit."

"They were already involved!" Ringo disputed, turning slightly desperate.

"If you didn't want to be my friend any more just say it, I'm not a little bitch. I can take it," Jessica turned back forward, her walls visibly building up and shutting her off from Ringo.

"If I didn't want to be your friend, would I seriously have ran the whole way down that driveway for your ass? I wouldn't run for my *life*," Ringo smiled softly, taking a sigh of relief when Jessica emitted a low snigger.

It was silent for a moment, but Jessica seemed to relax a little. The last thing Ringo wanted to do was lose her as a friend. Nancy and her may have been close through family, but Jessica was probably Ringo's first *true* friend, she made moving to Hawkins so much more bearable before she settled in.

"Look," Ringo began, casting a glance over her shoulder, "we're just babysitting the kids, right now. Do you wanna come up? I can't tell you much, but I can tell you all about Nancy and Jonathan. You're going to *die*."

"Nancy and Jonathan?" Jessica echoed with a gasp, lips stretching

into a grin. "No way!"

With a grin, Jessica put her car into drive and turned the steering wheel fully around, intending to make a U-turn on the road and return to the Byers residence.

"Well I can't miss that story, can I?"

With the tension finally dissolved between them, the girls travelled back up to the house. But the addition of a new car in front of the house caught Ringo's attention.

"What the heck?" She whispered, mainly to herself. The closer they came, the more she recognised the vehicle and concluded it could only have been Billy Hargrove's.

"Is Billy here too?" Jessica questioned, full of suspicion.

"No, he isn't," Ringo responded, voice slightly stiff with concern as she noticed the front door was wide open. Before the car had even pulled to a stop, she opened the door and bolted out into the night air, a bad feeling enveloping her.

Once again, she was sprinting. But this time it was towards the house, the shouts from the kids meeting her ears only spurring her on to move faster.

The second she rounded the corner of the entrance, her eyes dropped to the horrifying sight of a bloodied Billy beating up an even bloodier Steve. Beating may have been a term too light for his actions, as he was positioned over the top of the other teenager, pummelling his face mercilessly with his fists.

The kids were yelling for him to stop, and looked close to tears. Their shouts became muffled to her ears, her heart hammering in her chest as Ringo knew she had to act fast. For all they knew, Billy might not have stopped.

She grappled for the lamp positioned on an end table, ripping the socket from the wall and all but dived forward as she swung the lamp with all her strength. It met against the side of Billy's head with a sickening thud, immediately knocking him out cold and swinging

him limply in the direction he was hit.

Without taking a minute to analyse what she had done, Ringo dropped the now broken lamp at her feet and slid onto her knees next to Steve, sobs rising in her throat at his appearance.

Blood was trickling from his nostrils and his split lips, his face already starting to swell from the hits he took.

"Honey?" Ringo called out to him, cupping the sides of his head ever so gently as tears began to drip down her cheeks. "I'm home! Wake up!"

"Holy *shit*," Jessica's voice cut through the room as she entered, eyes darting back and forth between an unconscious Steve and Billy.

"Get some goddamn ice, please!" Ringo pleaded, biting her lower lip harshly. The boys and Jessica rushed to the kitchen to fetch some frozen food for Steve's face.

Max stayed behind, staring down at Billy's lifeless body with a cold expression.

"Is he... dead?" Ringo shakily asked, terrified that she may have hit him a smidgen too hard.

Max uncaringly lifted her foot and placed it on his stomach, rolling the teenager over onto his back. Immediately after doing so, he let out a groan of pain, his eyelids starting to flutter. Even though she hated him with every fibre in her being, she was thankful he was alive. A murder charge wasn't an achievement she'd have listed on a college resume.

Max swerved and roughly grabbed a needle that was laying next to the stereo, filled with a liquid meant to subdue Will. She uncapped it and dropped down, jamming it harshly into Billy's neck and then firing the empty syringe onto the ground. Immediately, he fell unconscious again.

"We don't need him waking up," Max explained to Ringo, who was watching her intently. With that dealt with, she ripped the frozen bags of peas and ice from the hands of the others that had fetched

them for her, placing them carefully around his face. Truly, she didn't know what else to do. Ring an ambulance? Try to wake him up?

"I can get him out of here," Jessica offered nodding towards a broken Billy. "Drop him on his front lawn and let him think he was on a wild bender. I'll just need help getting him to the car."

"Thank you," Ringo sniffled, fixing the bags of peas so they didn't slip and fall down.

Now with the immediate threat over with, the trio of boys shared a look, their eyes switching between Ringo and each other.

With Steve and Billy relatively okay, maybe now they could focus on making sure Eleven was too.

Howdy!

I've been waiting for Ringo to knock him the heck out since literally day one. Some scenes I've had pre-planned, and I literally have had this in mind since the first chapter.

Random note but Ringo's character has come so far it makes me so happy. She went from being someone that was kinda angry all the time, to someone that's always trying to make light of a situation and is now comfortable with showing her feelings - especially with Steve.

I hope everyone liked this chapter!

candy95 - Thank you! I just thought Mike and Hopper's conversation was rather private and solved everything, while nobody really focused on Max after she got snubbed. I had no idea I made that typo but I laughed so hard when you pointed it out ahah! Thanks for commenting!

Vince Basile Jr - Thanks so much as always! Hope you liked this one! x

- awww thank you so so much! I agree, Steve needs to suck it up and ask her but I have a plan for that. ;) I also really want their

relationship ahaha, it sounds conceited but I love the relationship I've written for them and their characters! Have a great day!

harleyquinn87 - I agree this is my favourite part of the show, mama Steve! Thank you! x

36. Teenage Kicks

"**DAMN KID,**" Jessica commented, reading over the shoulder of the younger girl in front of her as she furiously scribbled down letters on a page. "You trying to scare him or make him skip town?"

"I just want him to leave me alone," Max huffed, tossing the pen down after writing the final word and quickly re-reading it for mistakes.

"If you mess with Max and her friends again, the next time you won't make it home'," Dustin read the note aloud, eyes widened as he reached the end. "Jesus, Max. You said you were gonna spook him not send him a death threat."

The girl merely shrugged as she folded the note, walking towards Billy and crouching down so she could stuff it into his pocket.

"If he wants to go to the police, I'll just have to report all the illegal crap he's done since getting here," she explained, tucking the note into his jean pocket. It was met with an obstruction, causing her to furrow her brows as she curiously tugged out a set of car keys.

With a sudden glint of determination in her eye, she turned to Lucas with a smirk. He picked up on the look immediately, giving the same one to Mike, who caught on and passed it to Dustin.

Like clockwork, the four heads turned to Ringo, who was currently wiping some of the dried blood off of Steve's busted face.

"Hey, dingbats," Jessica snapped her fingers, shuffling to stand by Billy's head, "you helping me lift your mess out to my car, or what?"

Dustin stayed pointedly behind while the other three hurried forward to grab onto Billy. Jessica curled her hands under his arms, while Mike slid his hands underneath the boy's back and Max and Lucas each took a leg, respectively. With a serious expression, Mike nodded at Dustin before the four began to make their way towards Jessica's car.

"Jesus! He's heavy!" Lucas grunted, readjusting his grip while Max panted beside him.

"I've basically got his ass, wanna freakin' swap?!" Mike shouted in frustration, face reddening somewhat from the exertion.

"Next time don't knock him the heck out then!" Jessica barked, effectively silencing their complaints until they made it towards her open back door, all but throwing Billy onto the seat.

While the group caught their breaths and shoved his long limbs inside whatever way they could so they could shut the door, Dustin was inside trying to work his magic on his long-term crush.

"So, Ringo," he sighed slightly, dropping down to sit on his knees next to her. "This is really a bummer isn't it."

"Oh no, your boyfriend nearly getting beaten to death is a normal Tuesday around here," she deadpanned, not even sparing him a glance as she dipped the cloth back into the pink-tinged water once again.

"Oh, you guys are finally official!" He tried to exclaim happily, as a means of lightening the mood. "You know, as crap as this situation is, you know who's at risk of getting beat up too? Eleven."

"Why do you gotta say shit like that?" Ringo tossed her damp cloth down, giving him a fierce glare as she finally regarded upon him. "What next? Wanna tell me I'm adopted? I have a cut on my hand, wanna throw some acid in it?"

"No, no! I didn't mean it like that!" His eyes widened, backtracking slightly as he watched with horror as her eyes began to water.

"Oh for god's sake," Mike rolled his eyes as he re-entered the room, only needing a second to recognise that Dustin was most definitely not handling this correctly.

Mike stepped quickly over to the two, gripped Dustin by the shoulder while lowly muttering 'go away', before taking his place beside Ringo.

"Look," he began, taking a deep sigh. He wasn't one for emotional

speeches, but he would have done a million things he wasn't comfortable with if it meant helping Eleven. "You and I have always been friends. Even when Nancy and I weren't, you've always had my back. I see you as a sister, instead of a cousin."

On cue, Ringo burst into tears, more violently than anyone in the room had ever seen her. Fat tears instantly rolled down her cheeks while her chest heaved with sobs. Mike stumbled back slightly, terrified of the image in front of him.

"That's the nicest thing anyone's ever said," she blubbered, bringing the ends of her sleeves up to wipe at her cheeks. Mike contemplated for a minute, realising that he should probably keep going while she's upset, but to reel in on the emotional words.

"Right? I love you like a sister. But you know who else means a lot to me? Eleven. I *can't* lose her again, Ringo. You *know* this is a good idea. Please just... help us," suddenly Mike was feeling emotional himself, almost as if he might cry for the first time since last Halloween.

Ringo sniffled, looking down for a moment in thought before looking at the kids crowded around, waiting for her reaction. Jessica bit her nails by the doorway in suspense, trying to piece together what they were saying to make sense of it all.

"But..." she whispered, glancing back at Steve, who looked positively broken laying on the couch, "what about Steve?"

"He's knocked out, leave him here," Lucas suggested eagerly.

"I can't leave him, if he wakes up and sees us gone he'll assume the worst," she disputed stubbornly.

"Alright, then bring him with us," Max pointed out, her hopeful expression brightening as she watched Ringo's walls crumble.

"How are we even going to get there? And carrying Steve no less?" She stood up, wiping at her cheeks once more. At those words, the kids turned to Max, who proudly swung the ring of the key set around her index finger.

"What?" Ringo scoffed. "I can't drive!"

"Wait, you want *her* to drive?" Mike rushed to stand up too, a look of panic flashed on his face. "The only thing more dangerous than a horde of demogorgans is Ringo behind the wheel of a car!"

"Well she's made it outside a parking lot!" Max threw back, "and as far as I know, neither have any of you!"

Not leaving room for an argument, Max tossed the keys towards the blonde girl who expertly caught them in her hand. Sniffing once more, she gave them a swift nod and tried to push her emotions aside. They had a mission to complete.

"I'm gonna go, before he wakes up," Jessica interrupted as she came up behind Ringo. The blonde turned around to give her friend a tight hug, which was reciprocated quickly.

"I promise I'll explain everything when it's over," Ringo whispered against her ear, leaning back and forcing an encouraging smile on her lips. "Thank you."

"Yeah yeah," Jessica waved off, "I want free milkshakes for a month."

With Steve nestled in the backseat, wedged between Dustin and Mike with a squashed Lucas pressed against the door, Ringo started to doubt herself. Max eyed her carefully from the front passenger seat, watching as she shakily slid the keys into the ignition. Ringo had received driving lessons, she had been told. How much of a bad driver could she be?

"If you believe in a God, I'd pray to him now," Dustin commented from the backseat, holding onto the handle above the door until his knuckles whitened.

"Okay, I'm stressed enough as it is!" Ringo snapped, pointing her finger at her rear view mirror which gave her a view of the skeptical-looking kids in the back seat. "Shit like that isn't helping!"

"Everyone shut up so she can drive!" Lucas called out. As the engine roared to life, the radio began to blare loudly, the unmistakeable

opening sound of *Teenage Kicks* by the Undertones meeting everyone's ears.

Ringo shifted the car into the appropriate gear, her eyes flicking towards the radio, where she paused for a moment. The entire group were appalled as she began to cry once more.

"What the hell?!" Lucas cried out.

"T-this song!" She stammered through her sobs, pointing viciously at the tape deck. "Steve put this song on my mixtape!"

"Oh for crying out loud," Mike groaned, "Max shut the radio off!"

"Don't you dare!" The driver whipped around with fierce eyes, watery and reddened. Finally, she took the car out of park and began to slide out of the driveway, slowly and ever so carefully.

"I don't mean to be a pain, Ringo," Dustin muttered, "but I'd like to get there before Christmas."

"What did I say?!" She shouted at the top of her voice. Dustin recoiled, unaware that she was still crying when he had made a dig at her.

His words had an effect though, as she pressed the gas down further and began to speed up the road. So far, so good - the group thought. There were shaky moments here and there, but overall, Ringo was seemingly taking the roads like someone with an actual licence.

A couple of minutes had passed without fault, and they weren't far away from the entrance now. Luckily for them, the stretch of road had been straight so far. But there were a series of bends and turns ahead to take in order to get to the field they needed to go to.

Max bit back a scream as Ringo took a particularly sharp bend without slowing down, causing the tyres to squeal slightly against the road beneath. A groan sounded from the backseat, but Ringo assumed it was simply one of the kids complaining once more.

Steve opened his eyes blearily, the first thing he was aware of being the immense pain in his face and head. It battered through his skull

like a pulse, constricting his vision as his eyes were swollen. He felt as if he had been thrown off a bus, head first.

The low vibration beneath him wasn't familiar immediately, and when he was finally able to open his eyes, he looked around to see where he was. The first distinguishable thing was a person beside him, who looked oddly familiar.

"Nancy?" He mumbled in confusion, receiving furrowed brows in return. *Not Nancy then*, he thought. Deciding to find out for sure what was going on with his head, he tiredly lifted his hand up to touch his face, quickly being stopped by fingers grabbing his arm.

"No, no, don't touch it," Dustin whispered gently, taking his hands back from his face. Steve turned his head towards the voice, narrowing his eyes to focus his vision on a curly haired boy beside him, who smiled in encouragement. "Hey, buddy! It's okay, you put up a good fight. He kicked your ass but you put up a good fight. I won't even tell anyone your girlfriend had to save you."

"Okay, keep it straight for half a mile and then make a left on Mount Sinai," Max read out from the map to Ringo, who nodded and took a deep breath to calm herself.

"What's going on?" Steve asked, eyes zeroing in on Ringo - a face he most definitely recognised. At the sound of his voice, she looked over her shoulder in shock.

"Steve!" She exclaimed, lips lifting into a relieved grin. "You're awake!"

The more his eyes began to focus however, the more confused he became. Surely, Ringo didn't have her hands on the wheel of a car?

"Watch out!" Max shouted, bringing her attention back to the road and away from Steve. Ringo swerved a little, having looked back too long and nearly driven straight into the ditch. The action proved to solidify his thoughts, Ringo really *was* driving.

"*Oh my god*," he called out, an immediate sense of fear filling him as memories of their day on the country roads entered his head.

"Just relax, she's got the basics down," Dustin reassured him.

"Oh my god," Steve repeated.

"Is that why she drove Steve's car into a ditch?" Mike fired back, still uncomfortable with the driving situation.

"I can hear you!" She sang from the front seat.

"Accidents happen!" Lucas spoke on behalf of her, although with every bump in the road he grappled for something to hold onto.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" Steve began to shout, "what's going on?!"

"Steve, please don't be mad!" Ringo called back, looking over her shoulder again and stopping when she was met with a shout of protest from the kids. "I was just trying to *help*!"

"Left here!" Max pointed, almost a second too late. Ringo swung the wheel towards the left, the car just about making it around the corner and leaving a screeching sound in its wake once again.

"Oh my *god*!" Steve cried out in a panic. "No! Slow down! Stop the car!"

"We should have left him!" Mike grunted towards Dustin.

"Shut up!" Ringo's voice cracked, the girl on the verge of breaking again. "I'm trying to drive up here!"

"I swear to god if any of you make her cry again!" Max threatened, her head dropping back down to the map. "Another left here!"

As the command was given too late once again, Ringo made another dangerous turn, hitting the mail box of the nearest house on her journey and eliciting a scream from all occupants in the car - especially Steve.

The road led into an open stretch of grass, which contained a large hole that Hopper himself had dug. Unfortunately for them, Ringo was hurtling straight for the hole, clearly not having taken notice of it.

"Stop!" Max screamed, slamming her hands against the dashboard. Ringo rammed her foot down on the brake, swerving the wheel to avoid driving straight into the gaping hole. The car squealed in protest and spun around in a circle before it came to a complete stop.

Every member of the group sighed in relief.

When the threat of vehicular slaughter was effectively over, the kids grappled for their door handles to rush out of the car, all but sprinting for the trunk. Ringo fiddled with her seat belt, casting a desperate glance over her shoulder.

"Babe, stay in the car," she pleaded, running out to follow them. They gripped their goggles and bandanas previously packed, tugging them over their heads to stop the harmful air from meeting their lungs.

Steve didn't listen, crawling forward towards the open door until he eventually fell out onto the ground with a groan. Dropping her goggles, Ringo scurried over to his side, wrapping an arm around his waist as she brought him up to slump against the side of the car.

"Guys... no," he murmured tiredly, eyes closed as his head tilted back.

Ringo returned to the trunk and grabbed Joyce's pink skiing goggles, slipping them on. She made the executive decision to hand off the gas canister to Dustin, thinking that driving was already punishment enough for agreeing to this, she wasn't my going to carry that too.

A spare can of deodorant in Billy's trunk caught her eye, reaching for it and tucking it into her jacket pocket for safe keeping. The kids, too impatient to wait, set off already without her towards the entrance.

"Hey, where do you think you're all going?!" Steve called, clearly waking up again at the sight of the hole. Ringo met Mike's eyes through their thick goggles, shaking their heads in unison as they decided not to answer. "What are you *deaf*?! Hellooooo!"

"Steve, we have to do this! It's a damn good idea, shouldn't we help any way we can?" Ringo tried to explain calmly, slamming down the boot of the trunk.

"We are not going down there!" He disputed, pushing up so only one

arm leaned against the car and he could face the blonde. "I made myself clear!"

"And *I'm* making *myself* clear!" She argued, following after the kids stubbornly.

"There is no *chance* we are going down that hole! This ends right now! What, do you wanna *die*?"

"*Steve*," Dustin whipped around to interrupt the duo. "A party member requires our assistance. I know you promised to keep us safe, so keep us *safe*."

Ringo reopened the trunk of car after realising she had forgotten a vital part of her attire. Lifting the carved hilt of her axe out, she rested the wooden handle against her shoulder and reached for the backpack they had strategically packed. Just in case.

Ringo brought Steve's bag up for him to see, giving a light shrug.

"I'm going with or without you," she told him sincerely. It was a hard comment to make, knowing he only wanted to keep them safe and out of harm. But taking the safer option wasn't always the best one.

Steve sighed, rolling his eyes in frustration before taking the bag, his infamous bat poking out the back. He unzipped it quickly to unveil the weapon, before sliding his arms through the straps and taking the bandana and goggles offered to him by Dustin.

The boy ran off to catch up with his friends, leaving Ringo to wait on Steve to get ready. Once done, he pointed the end of his bat at her playfully.

"You're lucky I like you so much, or else I'd be leaving you *all* to die down there."

This may seem like a slower chapter but it's only leading up to an action packed one!

Out of curiosity, would anyone be interested in a sequel to this book when season 2 finishes that'll lead into season 3? I've already got

some ideas in mind and this just feels so close to the end and I've got soooooo much more to write.

Thanks everyone who reads and/or reviews!

RedVelvetPanPan - Me too! I love their friendship too much to mess it up

StrangerThings11HarryPotter - Ringo kicking Billy's ass might actually be my favourite part of the whole book haha, I'm glad you liked it too! Hope you liked this chapter! x

Vince Basile Jr - Ahh thank you so much! This book is keeping me going while we wait for season 3 anyways, but I feel a little off watching the show now without Ringo, it's probably because I wrote this book though haha. Have a lovely day! x

candy95 - Billy getting knocked out is iconic in any portrayal haha, it's a long time coming! Me too! I kinda feel like her character would feel left out if she wasn't brought into the mix and I love writing her dry ass sarcasm haha x

Court725 - Ringo is like a more caring version of Ted Wheeler she's so lax haha, Jessica is gonna find out what's happening when the whole thing is over and she'll officially be in the loop then, it's kinda sad how she's the only one that isn't! Thanks so much! x

37. The Butthole

RINGO TURNED ON HER FLASHLIGHT BEFORE SLIPPING DOWN INTO THE ENTRANCE. Before she did so, there was no light to speak of. But now that she could see, the tunnel positively took her breath away. It was a well-rounded tunnel, taking form in what she'd imagine being inside a human's gut would be like.

Dust particles floated through the air, likely the things that caused her to have to wear a bandana over her mouth in the first place. Steve soon dropped down after her with a heavy thud, standing upright and inspecting the tunnel with similar amazement.

"Holy shit," he remarked, looking around and doing a mental count to make sure all the kids were together.

"Uh," Mike said, shining his flashlight over the messily hand-drawn map, "yeah I'm pretty sure it's this way."

"Wow," Ringo drily commented, "you've convinced me."

"You're pretty sure or you're certain?" Dustin questioned.

"I'm 100% sure!" Mike snapped in return. "Just follow me and you'll know!" He turned to move off but was quickly interrupted by Steve.

"Woah, woah! Hey! I don't think so," he barked, stomping along the hard ground towards him. "If any of you little shits die down here, I'm getting the blame. Got it, dipshit?" Steve snapped the map from Mike's hands and began to step forward. "From here on out, I'm leading the way. Let's go!"

Ringo naturally fell behind a few steps, volunteering to take up the rear of the group to make sure nobody got lost or left behind while following Steve.

"Come on!" Steve demanded, the kids stepping as quickly as possible over the ridges in the ground. "Hey, a little hustle!"

"Shut *up*, dickhead," Ringo fired back, her voice echoing down. "I'm not about to fall flat on my ass!"

"Then next time let's do what I want to do and *stay home!*" He replied. Her mouth fell open in annoyance, before she eventually shrugged and nodded.

"Fair enough," she agreed.

She noticed that some areas in the walls and ground were splattered with something squishy and red, wincing every time she stood in it. It held the consistency of jelly, and if Ringo had to guess, she supposed it was the skin the demodogs were shedding every time they molted.

"Jesus Christ, this place is disgusting," she huffed, shuffling forward a little faster to avoid being left behind. Her quickened pace left her less careful of her steps, and the next time she stood on a discarded slab of skin, her converse shoe slipped.

With a small scream, Ringo fell forward with the trip, landing on her front directly on top of the dirt and slime. She paused for a minute in shock, her hands against the ground to stop her face from smacking against it.

"Ringo!" Steve shouted, turning swiftly around and backtracking to find her. He let out a small sigh of relief when his flashlight shone over her body on the ground, just as she was pushing herself up off the ground. "Are you okay?"

Instead of answering, she brought herself up to standing and looked down at the slime and dirt that now coated herself and her clothing. Her eyes lifted from her body to meet Steve's worried gaze, completely void of emotion as she was unsure whether to shout angrily or cry again.

Against his own will, Steve was fighting down the chuckles that arose in his throat at her appearance. But all the restraint in the world couldn't stop the howl of laughter that eventually fell from his mouth with so much force, he was doubled over with his hands on his knees.

His contagious laughter spread to Max, Lucas and Dustin, who joined in with giggles of their own. All flashlights were shone towards Ringo's stony expression, which somehow made the situation even funnier.

Having had enough, Ringo picked up the axe which she had dropped mid-fall and raised it up with both hands.

"Who's dying first?" She threatened. Mike, finally having had enough of their antics, stepped in with a roll of his eyes.

"Let's go! Jesus! Do I need to remind you of the gravity of our situation?" He sneered in annoyance, turning back to walk again.

"Gravity of our situation," Ringo mocked under her breath with a shake of her head. Steve jogged to catch up to the front again and lead the way.

Their trek eventually led them to a hub of sorts, where several tunnels all converged together to meet at one junction. But Steve, holding the map, knew which tunnel to take. Dustin paused in front of Ringo, lagging behind the others as a distinct sound met his ears.

"What is it?" She pressed, moving to stand beside him. When she saw his head tilted back, she followed his gaze and saw what was sure to be the strangest anomaly she'd ever seen in her existence.

"What the hell?" Dustin whispered, shining his flashlight towards the thing, which seemed to be pulsing somewhat.

"It looks like... a butthole?"

Before Dustin could even roll his eyes at her comment, the 'butthole' clenched and launched a flurry of particles directly aimed at Dustin's head. He immediately fell to the ground with a scream, batting at his face with his hands.

"Help! Help!" He began to shout, running to catch up with the group who had immediately turned around upon hearing his original scream.

"Dustin!" Mike and Max called out in horror as the boy dropped to his knees, sliding down the bandana and taking a breath.

"What happened?!" Steve demanded, pushing them aside to reach him.

"It's in my mouth!" Dustin was hysterically whimpering. "Some got in my mouth! *Shiiiiit!*"

"Shit," Steve answered, feeling at a loss as he watched Dustin cough mercilessly. "Wait, where's Ringo?!"

His flashlight moved to shine back from where they came, landing on Ringo almost immediately. The blonde's bandana was pushed down as well, and her mouth was opened widely as if she was struggling to breathe.

Before anyone could run to help her as well, the loudest shriek of a laugh finally made its way out of her throat, breaking down into cackles that emanated through the tunnels. Ringo was smacking her knee as her body shook with her guffaws.

"H-he..." she stopped to laugh even harder, finger pointing at Dustin who seemed to make somewhat of a recovery, "h-he got shitted on by a freakin' *butthole!*"

A chorus of sighs rang out from the group, who turned their attention back to Dustin as he started to sit up. The pre-teen gave a small embarrassed nod.

"I'm okay," he admitted.

"Very funny man," Steve grunted, turning to continue their journey.

"God, what an idiot," Max rolled her eyes, following the group.

Ringo came up behind Dustin as he brought himself to his feet, smacking him on the back of the shoulder with a smirk as she tugged her bandana back up.

"Let's go... *butthead,*" her nickname re-stirred her amusement, still sniggering as they trailed ahead together.

A couple of minutes passed, leading them to another intersection. If Ringo thought the previous one was a hub, she was completely wrong. This one was easily twice as big, with twice as many tunnels converging together.

"Alright, young Wheeler," Steve nodded, stuffing the map in his pocket. "I think we've found your hub."

"Let's drench it," Mike suggested.

The group began to douse the hub in gasoline, Ringo untying the canister she had on her back to follow suit. She made sure all the entrances except the one they came from were coated in the flammable liquid, until all that came out any more was a few droplets.

With that done, they scurried back to their tunnel and crouched down.

"All right, you guys ready?" Steve asked, taking the lighter from his pocket and opening it.

"Light it up, babe," Ringo encouraged as everyone else agreed.

"God," Steve sighed as he set the lighter alight, "I am in such deep shit."

With that he tossed the lighter forward, while everyone instantly turned and readied themselves to run, the sounds of flames igniting and a creature groaning in pain. Tentacles arose through the fire, which they saw when they looked over their shoulders mid-run. Ringo was horrified at the thought. They weren't mere tunnels after all, the creatures were there the entire time.

Ringo tried desperately not to fall as she ran, but it was proving difficult when following behind a group of kids with shorter legs than herself.

"Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god!" Steve was repeating loudly, the echoes of screeches meeting his ears.

Mike tripped over what he believed to be a ridge, until tentacles began to stretch around his legs and keep him down. Ringo finally caught up with him as her cousin shouted for help, whipping out the can of deodorant from Billy's car and her lighter.

She sparked up the flame and angled the nozzle behind it, pressing

down the button and creating a cloud of fire within inches of Mike's feet. It cried out in pain, letting go of the boy soon after.

"Come on," Ringo cried out, gripping his underarms and hauling him to his feet.

The group had returned when they noticed Mike and Ringo lagging behind, helping Ringo bring Mike to a standing point.

"Guys, we gotta go!" Dustin was anxiously ordering. But when the group turned to run once more, they were met with yet another obstacle. This time, a lone demodog.

It opened its terrifying mouth at Dustin, who was standing closest to it. Ringo brought up her lighter and deodorant again, ready to light the demon the hell up - until Dustin spoke.

"Dart?" He called out. The creature's mouth closed at his call, prompting Dustin to step forward. His move was met with immediate disapproval from the rest of the group.

"Trust me," Dustin held his hand out to quiet them. "Please."

He stepped toward Dart, mumbling lowly to him as if it were a pet. Ringo and Steve met eyes, both widened in fright before looking back to the altercation. Her axe was tucked into a makeshift strap on her back, but she found her homemade flamethrower seemed to be much more effective.

"Will you let us pass?" Dustin asked the demodog, who was unusually calm until that question - opening his mouth to expose all his teeth and scream in refusal.

The group jumped in fright tightening their hold on their weapons and huddling closer together. But Dustin wasn't phased.

"Okay, okay," Dustin reasoned. "I'm sorry about the storm cellar. It was a pretty douchey thing to do. You hungry?"

"Have I stepped into the fucking Twilight zone?" Ringo whispered.

"He's insane," Lucas agreed, watching while Dustin brought a candy

bar out of his pocket and held it up.

"I've got your favourite candy," he beamed, "nougat!"

"Is he seriously trying to win this thing over with a freakin' 3 Musketeers bar?!" Ringo hissed in shock, until Steve shushed her.

'Dart' stepped forward, gobbling up the candy Dustin was leaving on the ground. The boy waved at the group with his hand, who were able to sneak successfully by while Dustin kept him fed. Eventually, he was able to get by himself, the creature not protesting at the movement while it peacefully ate.

"Goodbye buddy," he told it, bringing his skiing goggles back down to cover his eyes.

"Jesus dude," Steve shook his head as they retreated back to the opening, "you're freakin' insane."

They ran for what felt like ever, the return journey feeling so much longer than the first. Ringo worried internally in case they were going the wrong way, until a violent shudder shook the tunnel, causing them all to lose their balance and clutch for their walls. Again, Ringo fell down, onto her bottom this time.

"Seriously?" She threw her hands up in frustration, accepting Steve's hand as he helped her to her feet. A growl met their ears, sounding as if it were closer than before.

"What was that?" Max dared to ask, as they shone their flashlights in that direction.

"They're coming!" Mike shouted, whipping around. "Run!"

It was something they had been doing already, or so Ringo thought. This time, she was sprinting with a speed she never knew she possessed, completely fuelled by adrenaline as the creatures nipped at their heels. *This was a foolish idea*, and she cursed herself over and over for it mentally.

Now, she was at risk of not just losing her own life, but losing the lives of four kids she held dear to heart and a man she had truly

come to love - something she had never admitted before, not even to herself.

The second the rope and the light from the moon met their eyes, a burst of energy flooded through them to reach it in time.

"Come on, go! Let's go! Go!" Steve was barking when he reached the rope, grappling for Max and propelling her upward so she could grip onto the grass and drag herself out. With him doing the heavy lifting, Ringo came to the conclusion that it was her who would have to defend the group from the back.

With her heart hammering and her chest panting from exertion, she brought the lighter and can up one final time, readying to hit both the second she saw a flicker of movement in front of her.

A chorus of shrieks reverberated through the walls just as Steve had launched Dustin upward and out. Glancing over his shoulder, he not only saw the shadows of the incoming horde, but he also saw Ringo standing a few feet away from him, ready to defend them.

"Steve! Ringo! Come on!" The kids were roaring through the opening, but they were out of time. Steve reached for his discarded bat and joined her at her side, holding it up on the air.

Ringo looked over in shock as her shoulder brushed against his.

"Steve! Get out of here, now! I'll hold them off!" She demanded, terror gripping her when she realised he hadn't escaped with the others.

"I'm not leaving you!" He shouted back, shaking his head. "Not a chance in hell!"

"I am *not* losing you! Get out now!"

"I'm not losing you either!" She never got to argue his words, as the flurry of demodogs finally rounded the corner.

Ringo flicked the wheel of her lighter and pressed as hard as she could on the top of the deodorant, flames releasing immediately in front of them. Steve winced as he prepared for the impact, but within seconds, both his bat and her lighter were being lowered.

The couple watched in amazement as the demodogs parted around them like a river, scurrying past as if they didn't even exist and hurtling down the tunnel, as if they too were escaping.

Steve reached for Ringo and brought her against his chest, without restraint, to widen the gap and allow them pass more easily. When the crowd were finally gone, he loosened his grip, allowing her to slide down from his arms.

She immediately whipped around and regarded upon his grin of achievement, responding to it with a slap against his chest.

"Hey! What was that for?" He protested, before receiving an onslaught of slaps against his upper arms.

"Why didn't you leave?! Why did you come back?!" She demanded, continuing her attack.

"Hey hey hey hey!" He stopped her by gripping her hands, but the second she stopped hitting him she broke down.

Ringo slumped against his chest, angrily shoving her goggles and bandana away from her face as tears streaked her cheeks. Unlike before, these weren't ones of panic. This was of pure terror.

She and Steve had essentially looked death in the eye, and what frightened her most was that she was more concerned for him than for himself. The idea of losing him had almost punched a hole of loss in her chest. Ringo knew better than anyone, after her father's death, how fragile life could be.

Steve consoled her for a moment, wrapping his arms around her and discarding his own glasses and scarf. After a few seconds passed, he used his grip on her to gently coax her towards the rope, unwinding her arms from his middle and grabbing onto her hips.

Ringo swiped the tears away from her cheeks and took a deep breath, placing her hands on his shoulders as he lifted her by the hips upward, her hands grasping on to Mike, Dustin and Lucas' waiting ones. With their group effort, they hauled her out of the tunnel. Steve - with his best subject being gym class, dragged himself out by doing

the rope climb.

"What was that about?" He whispered to her, tugging her away from the group, eyes full of concern.

She shook her head for a moment, deciding she owed him the truth. In admitting it to him, she was destroying the final emotional wall she had built to keep people out. She was fully submitting herself to him and opening up, and she didn't even care.

"After my dad... and how I left things with him... the thought of losing you terrifies me every day. The thought of losing *any* of you, but especially you. I never know when is the last time I'll see you or the last time we talk, and that scares me to the point of walking around with this constant weight on my shoulders. This constant *fear*."

Steve's expression melted at her admission, stepping forward and bringing her into his chest, tucking her head underneath his chin.

"You're not going to lose me, I promise-" he assured her, before being cut off.

"How can you promise that?" She demanded, voice muffled against his chest. He leaned back to see her face, lifting his hands to cup her cheeks and wipe the stray tears with the pads of his thumbs.

"Because... because I'm Steve freakin' Harrington," he answered, smirking cockily enough to receive the smallest smiles of amusement.

"You're so lame," she rolled her eyes playfully, taking a deep breath as she began to return to reality and calm down.

"Too lame to be your boyfriend?" He asked, catching her off guard. She paused for a second as she took in his words. When she finally fully realised what he had just said, her lips broke into the most breathtaking grin Steve had ever seen.

"Definitely," she agreed, "but I'll let you be my boyfriend anyway."

He chuckled under his breath, leaning in to press a kiss to the tip of her nose before capturing her lips in a kiss that quietened all her

fears. The possibility of death nipped at their heels every day, and instead of running from it, she was going to do the most to make every moment count. Being with Steve meant doing just that.

Their kiss was interrupted by a bright light, causing them to break apart to see Billy's headlights shine brighter than before, almost blinding them.

The group stood, mystified for a moment, but it was Mike who offered an explanation with one single word. A name.

"Eleven."

Hello hello! I quite like this chapter and I hope everyone else does too! They're finally together YEO. Even though they basically have been for a while ahaha.

Thanks everyone for reading and/or commenting!

RedVelvetPanPan - I'm so glad to hear that! I'd love to keep their story going and I'm glad you like Ringo!

Vince Basile Jr - I say this every week and I mean it every time your words are sooo kind and so uplifting! Thank you so so much, I already have ideas for season 3 and where I plan on taking it. I'd like to start a sequel before season 3 comes out because i think it'd be nice to write it while everyone is waiting!

candy95 - I'm so glad to hear it! Dialogue-heavy chapters can be a hit or miss sometimes! Thanks so much and I hope you like this one too x

StrangerThings11HungerGames - ugh I need that too so much! I'm glad you can relate to her in that way! I'm pretty sure at this point I'll do a sequel I honestly can't let these characters go yet I feel like they have so much more to give! Thanks so much and I hope you have a wonderful day! x

zaneri0t - if people are up for reading it I'll definitely do a sequel!

Court725 - I was rereading this book the other day and daaaaaamn

she really has come so far, at the beginning she was so standoffish and tough and now she's here crying I just love her development. Thank you so much! Hope you liked this chapter!

38. The Debrief

RINGO'S APARTMENT WAS CLOSE TO MAX'S HOUSE, THEY HAD DISCOVERED.

Steve drove each of the pre-teens except Max home, before heading towards the location where he left his own car to pick it up. The idea was for Ringo to take Steve's car until Billy's was returned to the Hargrove residence, but one glance at his vehicle and Steve was disagreeing. He just couldn't, and wouldn't, risk his car. Girlfriend, or not.

So he followed behind Billy's flashy sports car while Ringo drove, a reasonable distance behind in case she suddenly braked. Max smirked watching the reflected headlights in the rear view mirror.

"He really doesn't trust your driving, does he?" She asked in amusement. Ringo rolled her eyes playfully, but understood there was probably a good reason behind that.

When finally they arrived at her house, a dark figure could be seen spread out across the grass. Max and Ringo chuckled at the sight, Jessica wasn't kidding when she said she'd dump him on the front lawn.

"Hey," Ringo called to get the girl's attention before she left, "if he gives you any shit you call me, okay?"

"Thanks, but I think I can handle him now," Max smiled with appreciation. "I'll let you know if he's ever beating up your boyfriend again."

"Good!" She grinned, watching as Max reached for the door handle. "Oh, wait!"

"Yeah?" Max leaned down slightly to look back in, having already stepped out of the car.

"We do this thing... the kids and, well everyone really. We call it Wheeler Family Fridays but literally everyone comes. We just watch

movies in the basement and play games. And as a Wheeler, and the best one at that, I'm officially extending that invitation to you."

Max tried to play it cool, but her cheeks indented with how hard she concealed her grin. Eventually she broke and positively beamed, nodding her head in acceptance before finally closing the door just as Ringo reversed into the parking space.

Steve was parked further down the street, waiting for her to give her a ride home. When she got inside, he waited for a second until her seat belt was fastened before veering off.

"So," he began, "as far as dates go, I would say that went swimmingly."

"Well you know what they say," she nodded, "take him monster-hunting on the first date to see if he's a wuss bag."

"Wuss bag?" Steve echoed, grinning with humour. "That hurt my feelings."

"Okay Mr 'OH MY GOD OH MY GOD OH MY GOD OH MY GOD'," she mimicked his high pitched, panicked voice from their escapades in the tunnel.

"At least I value my life," he fired back, "whoever let you drive obviously didn't."

"I could have left you behind, you know?" She warned, holding back her laughter.

"I know," he sighed calmly, pulling to a stop outside of her apartment building and turning to her. He sat there for a minute, watching her unbuckle her belt as slowly as possible.

"I don't want to leave yet," Ringo admitted with a shrug, eyes fixed on the main entrance.

"You'll miss me that much?"

"No," she gave him a weird look, "my mom's going to kill me when I go in."

"Well if you don't get grounded for the rest of your born days," he waggled his eyebrows, leaning over the centre and pressing a delicate kiss to her lips, "I'll see you soon, girlfriend."

"I'll see you soon, boyfriend," Ringo repeated, smiling into the kiss and placing a gentle hand against his cheek. When they broke apart, he kissed the tip of her nose shortly.

Despite the events of the night before and the incoming fury from her mother, she couldn't help but walk a little lighter than she used to - feeling as if she was floating on air.

"Yes she's around 5'5, long blonde hair-" Julia Wheeler's voice was interrupted by the sound of the front door opening, her mouth falling open in shock before stuttering a reply to the confused operator. "Never mind! I found her!"

With that, she clicked the phone back into place and marched into the hallway with a fury in her step. Ringo kept her gaze on her feet, too scared to meet her eye. Julia was dry and sarcastic the majority of the time, but that was her sense of humour taking fold. It wasn't often she was severely angry - and the last time she had reached this level, Ringo had vandalised a car.

"I don't even want to *look* at you Ringo," her mother began, voice cold. "The dirt on you, the bags underneath your eyes - I actually convinced myself that maybe you *weren't* out partying, that you had learned your lesson and knew better than to stay out all night. I haven't slept a wink out of fear that I'd get a phone call telling me they found you in a ditch."

"Mom-" Ringo started, before breaking off again, lifting her head to meet her mother's expression. No amount of apologies would be worthy of what her mother deserved right now.

"I just want to know," Julia sighed, rubbing her forehead with her hand. "Were you partying?"

"Mom, no! I swear I wasn't!"

"Well, then were you kidnapped?" She asked, an eyebrow raised.

"God- no! I was helping the kids out with something..."

"Helping with what?"

Ringo didn't answer. After all, she was legally obliged to keep this secret from everyone - family included. But this was no longer a case of fearing her mother's reaction, she knew now that her mom simply *had* to know, or their relationship would never be the same thereafter.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you..." Ringo trailed off, lower lip quivering with oncoming tears.

"No, what I don't *believe* is that you wouldn't come home for a whole day. It's now 11am, and you've been gone for twenty-four hours. I called the *police*, but they wouldn't accept my claim until the full day had passed. I called Karen, who was worried because Nancy had told her she was staying at a friend's but she wasn't so sure now."

To her horror, Julia's eyes started to water - in both sadness and pure anger, a complete wash of emotion. Ringo never saw her mother cry, not even when her father died.

"I can't lose you either, Ringo. Your dad left and I just... I can't sit around wondering if you're okay."

On instinct, the blonde stepped forward and wrapped her arms around her mother securely. They weren't the hugging type, but both mother and daughter gripped onto each other like a life source at that moment. Tears sprang in Ringo's own eyes, and it wasn't long until she was crying too.

They stood for what felt like ages, but was probably only a couple minutes in reality. When finally they broke apart, it felt as if the unspoken subject had finally been broached - that of her father's death. Now that they could start working on getting over it, it was Ringo's time to shine, and tell her mother a story she'd never forget.

Steve took the initiative to talk to Ringo first - giving her a day to

recover and talk to her mother before calling her. He imagined she'd have some things to explain - not that he could relate. His parents had left last weekend for a trip to Vancouver. They did ask if he wanted to join, and Steve was ever so thankful he had said no. If he hadn't have been there, god knows if Ringo and the kids would even be alive right now.

"Hello?" Julia's voice met his ear, his expression twisting in surprise.

"Hi! Mrs Wheeler... it's Rin- Steve! Sorry, I meant it's Steve," he stammered nervously, ever so intimidated by the woman and her merciless sense of humour.

"Don't tell me you're going to be one of those couples that basically become one person," she remarked sarcastically, catching Ringo's eye from the dining table, who looked at her quizzically.

"She told you we were dating?" His eyes widened. He didn't think Ringo would get to a place with her mother where she would tell her these things openly, but perhaps their day together had caused a shift in their relationship.

"She told me a lot more than that," Julia smirked knowingly at her daughter, "you couldn't take Billy Hargrove? Really?"

"Mom," Ringo groaned with mild amusement, knowing full well her mother didn't even know Billy, but loved to tease Steve nonetheless.

"You see, the thing about *that* is that I didn't fight back, because I'm a pacifist and a calm individual that you can trust your daughter to be in the company of," Steve rambled on, eliciting a chuckle from the older woman.

"Oh for god's sake," Julia rolled her eyes playfully, handing the phone over to a waiting Ringo.

"Hey!" The blonde greeted cheerily.

"Hey, you," he smiled brightly. "How did your mom take it?"

Ringo flushed slightly at the question, sensing her mother's gaze fixed on her face as she listened intently to whatever her daughter

answered.

"Later," Ringo answered with a promise, turning away from watchful eyes to bite her lip excitedly. "I don't think I'm coming to school for the rest of the week."

"Oh? Why not?"

"Mom said that a near death experience seems like a worthy excuse to stay home for two days," Ringo smiled in appreciation over her shoulder. The dynamic between them had changed somewhat, definitely for the better.

The day before, many tears and arguments were held, but it was an opportunity for them both to get everything off their chest. Julia believed Ringo's drinking and recklessness was a problem - but it was steadily declining since their move to Hawkins. Julia also pointed out Ringo was ignoring her father's death, and if she didn't grow to accept it and forgive both him and herself she'd never move on. While Ringo told her mother essentially everything she was contractually obliged to keep private - from Eleven, to Will's disappearance and the demogorgans. Her mother was an extreme skeptic, and it took several hours to convince her it actually happened and Ringo hadn't taken acid. Eventually, Julia cracked and called Nancy's mother, who backed up the story.

For the first time in a while, Julia and Ringo both saw things changing for the better. They were finally landing on their feet, and closer than ever before.

"Are you grounded?" Steve questioned. "Or are you allowed to come out?"

"Jessica is actually supposed to come over so I can fill her in on everything, she's going crazy in her house waiting on our big secret," Ringo chuckled, tiredly rubbing her eye with her free hand. Staying awake for as long as they did left her absolutely exhausted.

"How about tomorrow? Is Wheeler Friday happening or does Karen need some time to lay into Nancy and Mike?"

"I think it's been pushed back to next week. Pretty sure Mike's too hell bent on seeing Eleven to listen to Karen, and he really wants her to come so it'll probably be next Friday."

"Then I'm taking you out tomorrow night," Steve announced proudly, a growing smirk on his lips. "I looked death in the eye, I'm making the most of the rest of my life."

Ringo opened her mouth to giggle, but it was cut off by a knock on the door. She said a quick goodbye to her boyfriend, with the acceptance of his offer, and rushed to the door.

Jessica was leaning against the door frame, one eyebrow raised and her arms crossed over her chest.

"I want to hear *everything*," she began, whipping off the sunglasses she had worn purely for dramatic effect. "I want *scandal*. I want *drama*. I want to know everything from the weather to what colour of underwear you wore that day."

"Hello to you too, Jessica," Ringo beamed sarcastically, "why don't you please come inside? It's so lovely to see you!"

"Enough small talk," Jessica marched straight past her, a scheming smirk on her lips as she headed towards Ringo's room, after hollering a quick greeting to Julia in the kitchen.

Ringo walked slowly after her, wanting to delay the upcoming conversation as much as possible. In the end it was inevitable, trailing into her bedroom she saw Jessica lounging in her desk chair, pointing at the bed for her friend to take a seat.

"Spill the details, Iago."

"Basically," Ringo sighed, "the government are crooked as hell and they're covering up these inter-dimensional monsters that live in an alternate dimension but keep coming here and stealing kids."

Instead of renouncing her claim, Jessica merely nodded calmly, her finger tips pressing against each other and lips pursed in thought.

"I'd believe that. We can't trust our government. My dad made me

read 1984 by Orwell when I was nine and I've been paranoid ever since."

"That's basically it," Ringo lay back on her bed, her legs hanging off the side of it. "Oh, and the things killed Barb, almost killed all of us and enslaved Will."

This time Jessica looked perplexed, settling into the chair further as she prepared for what was sure to be a crazy story.

"Damn, and I thought my week was interesting because I opened a door for a girl and she smiled at me."

"I thought we could do with a debrief," Ringo announced to the group, who were crammed into the same booth as her. Brainshakes was fairly empty considering it was a Friday evening, which made it all the better. Ringo hadn't seen any of them apart from Jessica since the events a few nights ago, save for talking on the phone.

"And *I* thought we were going on a date," Steve commented with a huff, wedged against the wall with Ringo beside him and Jessica on the other side of her.

"Oh Steve," she cooed childishly, patting his cheek gently with pouted lips, "you're going to have to come to accept that Jessica and Nancy are in this relationship too."

"Normally a guy would be thrilled to hear he's dating three girls," he rested his arm around Ringo's shoulders, nodding his head comically. "Until you realise one's your ex girlfriend and the other is a lesbian."

"If that hair gets any longer I might be into it," Jessica replied teasingly, tossing him a wink.

The group shared a light-hearted laugh as they sipped on their milkshakes, but Ringo's eyes were fixed on Jonathan's hand, which seemed to be slowly inching towards Nancy's on the table.

She stayed staring, her cheeks lifting into a grin until eventually Jonathan noticed her watching eye and snapped his hand back to himself.

"Oh for fuck sakes," she groaned, throwing her hand up in the air and catching everyone by surprise. "Grab her damn hand, Byers!"

"Wait!" Jessica gasped, eyes dramatically wide and darting back and forth between the two accusatorially. "You two are *together*?"

"N-no!" Nancy stammered, cheeks a fiery red. She didn't know what she and Jonathan were, they had been dancing around the subject more than Ringo danced around living rooms when intoxicated.

It was silent for a moment, Ringo meeting Steve's eye as they silently debated on whether or not to say what they were thinking.

"They had sex!" Steve blurted eventually, an octave too high as he managed to capture the attention of a family sitting a couple of tables away.

Jonathan rolled his eyes and sunk back into the seat, while Nancy sputtered in shock.

"Steve! Will you stop telling people that?!"

"You had *sex*?!" Jessica whisper-shouted.

"Hey," Ringo defended, hands in the air in defence. "If a bunch of pre-teens can know, Jessica can know. Let's be honest, who *doesn't* know at this point?"

A few more pointed jokes were made at their expense, but eventually the conversation retreated to that night once more. Jonathan did actually reach for Nancy's hand after a while, but Ringo settled for a quiet smile at the action this time, instead of commenting.

"I can't believe you guys were nearly dying while I was at home watching The A Team," Jessica snorted.

"Jokes aside," Ringo coughed, feeling a little awkward by the serious tone she had adopted. "I'm really happy you all made it. Love you, and all that cheesy crap."

"Awww," Steve beamed as the group cooed to embarrass her. Leaning in and wrapping both arms around her, he began dragging

her over playfully towards him to plant messy kisses on her cheeks.

"Look who's a softball!" He announced, ignoring Ringo's hands as they batted at his arms to get him to stop.

There's so few chapters left I'm panicked ; _ ; hope everyone liked this chapter!

Thanks everyone who read/reviewed the previous chapter! xx

StrangerThings11HungerGames - This comment was such a delight to read! It is such a compliment that you think she should be in Stranger Things, my heart is soooo full right now. Ringo is my absolute favourite character to write, other books I've written I feel need rewritten but I don't think there's anything I'd change about her. She's a blend of 80s American teenage girl tropes and real life experiences. I'm so happy that you think Steve's development has been good in the book as well, you've truly made my day and I hope you have a fantastic one yourself! xx

Vince Basile Jr - Thank you so much! And thank you for your continued support it means the world! x

candy95 - Feels so good to finally write them as a couple... 37 chapters later!

Fanafan - All night oh my god! It blows my mind people get that invested in this book, thank you so much for commenting you're so kind!

39. Sixteen Candles

NANCY AND JONATHAN HAD DONE GOOD, Ringo decided. When the news broke of the sinister happenings going on in Hawkins Laboratory, they were forced to admit their part in Barb's death and cover-up.

She felt guilty for not helping Nancy before, for choosing to put her fear of breaching a contract over the loss of an innocent teenage girl. Barb's parents were heartbroken at her funeral, but ultimately, they were better off knowing the truth, before they ran themselves into debt by paying investigators.

The scene of her funeral was a tragic one, her mother's soft cries reaching Ringo's ears as she nestled into Steve's side. She didn't know Barb as well as Nancy, but that didn't stop her from feeling the guilt that was hanging over herself, Steve and Nancy.

They were inside the house when it happened, after all. Mere feet away from potentially being able to save her life. If Ringo had drank less, perhaps she'd have woken up to sounds. As if sensing her thoughts, Steve squeezed her side with the hand he had wrapped around her waist, grabbing her attention.

"You alright?" He whispered, eliciting a soft smile of reassurance and a nod.

Barb's parents grew more emotional as the casket was slowly lowered inside, a bouquet of white lilies on top - her favourite. Following Nancy's lead, the couple walked towards the mound of dirt beside the grave, reaching down and picking up a handful to gently toss inside.

It was such a small ceremony, but Ringo supposed Nancy had been right. Everyone really was starting to forget about Barb, now that the novelty of her unusual death was wearing off once again.

Ringo gently detached from Steve, giving him a nod towards Nancy that explained her actions as she slipped away to her cousin's side, linking their elbows together. The Wheelers, with Steve following closely behind, headed towards their respective cars.

"How are you doing?" Ringo murmured to her cousin, keeping her voice low. Nancy shook her head, it was clear from her under eyes she had been crying, but she held a somewhat peacefulness to her expression.

"Better than I thought," she admitted, sighing wistfully. "I'm just glad we got to give her the goodbye she deserved."

"Me too," Ringo agreed, nudging the side of their heads together in a side-hug.

When they reached the parking lot, Ringo let go of her arm. She had arrived here with Steve, but wasn't exactly sure she wanted Nancy to be alone tonight.

"Do you want me to come with you? Have a girl's night?" She suggested.

"No, no," Nancy shook her head tiredly, "I think I'd rather just spend the night alone, if that's okay?"

"Of course," Ringo nodded, starting to retreat backwards in Steve's direction. "Will I see you at school tomorrow?"

"Sure, can't wait," she drawled sarcastically, lips lifting in a half-attempt of a smile. Steve placed his hand on Ringo's lower back as she neared closer, opening the passenger door for her.

When they were safely inside and out of hearing distance from Barb's family, Ringo allowed her shoulders to slump, hand rubbing her forehead to soothe the headache that was forming.

Steve grimaced at the sight of her, knowing she was still reeling from the events at Halloween and her own father's death anniversary was up and coming. But he knew well how to handle his girlfriend by now - and that was by playful distraction.

"So, I think it's my turn to pick the movie for Wheeler Friday's tomorrow night," he mused, starting the car into drive. "I was thinking Sixteen Candles."

His words managed to break the essence of a smile on her lips.

"What?" She laughed, looking at him incredulously. "That's a chick flick, you know?"

"And what, Ringo?!" He slapped his hand over his chest, faking offence. "Can't a guy watch a good chick flick?! What happened to your feminist rhetoric?"

"Well maybe *I'm* the one who doesn't want to see it, hm!" She started to laugh, already becoming distracted from her thoughts. "Maybe I want to watch a good ol' horror movie that will give the kids the shakes!"

"Ringo Wheeler," his eyes widened dramatically, "it is El's *first* Wheeler Friday, hasn't she been through *enough*?"

"Clearly not, because Mike's asking her to the Snow Ball dance," she snickered, visibly relaxing in the seat and crossing her legs.

"Ah, the Snow Ball dance," he hummed in thought, lips curving with amusement. "Good times. Tommy tried to spike the punch one year."

The conversation lulled into a comfortable silence, but the events planned for that evening soon had Steve frowning in thought. It was bad timing, they recognised, to hold the official 'meet the mother' dinner on the night of Barb's funeral. But it was the only night that accommodated both Julia and Steve.

Steve adored his girlfriend, but that feeling was far overshadowed by his fear of her mother. It wasn't that he thought Julia was a generally mean woman, but he was well aware that her approval meant the world to Ringo.

That, and Julia liked to intimidate Steve as if she were ten feet taller than him, rather than a relatively small single mother.

"What am I supposed to wear tonight? A suit?" He asked nervously, eyes casting down to the black one he had currently donned for the funeral, wondering if that was suitable.

"You do know my mother will roast you like a chicken if you arrive in a suit," she chuckled, shaking her head. "Just wear something casual, it's my Mom, not the First Lady."

"I'm not used to meeting the 'mom', okay?" He scraped his hand through his ever-growing hair. "I'm used to climbing through windows and *avoiding* parents."

"Well I wouldn't recommend climbing my window," she scrunched up her nose, "I'm on the fifth floor."

"Hey, a man will do what he has to do to get some," he held his hand over his chest in defence, eliciting a laugh from her and a gentle slap against his shoulder.

Julia beamed the second the door opened, looking far more friendlier than Steve had ever seen before. The bouquet of yellow tulips in his hand clutched tight enough to whiten his knuckles, as he forced his cheeks into a smile and outstretched his hand.

"I told her to be nice," Ringo's voice rang out from further inside, her figure appearing suddenly behind her mother. Julia's stiff posture broke with amusement after a moment, taking the flowers from his hands and leaving the door open for him to enter.

"Lighten up, Steve," she called back, moving to fetch a vase and fill it with water. "Thanks for the flowers, but I'm not Cinderella's stepmom. Yeesh."

"You sure about that?" Ringo asked teasingly, after pressing a kiss in greeting to Steve's cheek. "You sure do work me like a slave."

"Slave! Ha!" Julia laughed once, full of sarcasm as she set the flowers into the newly filled pot. "There are spiders in this house who do a better job of shifting dust by simply *moving*."

Steve was still quiet since arriving, running a hand over his coiffed hair and awkwardly fidgeting. He didn't want to interrupt their banter. In truth, he didn't want to do anything at all that would make him the centre of attention. This was, after all, his first time sitting down to dinner with a girlfriend's parent. Nancy's parents had settled for casual 'hello's' in the hallway.

"Sit down, Steve," Julia urged, nodding towards the dining room table

that he all but flew towards. Ringo laughed at his nervous demeanour as she slid in beside him. "I've made a pot roast, is that alright?"

Steve made an executive decision at that point to respond to Julia's humour with comments of his own, hoping it would ease the awkwardness of the night.

"Actually, I only eat fish on Thursdays," he faked a sad smile, shrugging with regret. Julia's eyes twinkled at his newfound relaxed attitude. "You'll send my digestive system totally out of whack."

"Oh, forgive me!" She cried out dramatically. "Let me just go down to the lake on the other side of town and hand-spear your dinner!"

Steve laughed heartily, sipping from the glass of water that was left at his place at the table. It had been a while since he had been at a family dinner. With his parent's flakiness, any time either his mother or father was present, the other wasn't.

"Do you want a beer, Steve?" Julia called from the kitchen, Ringo jumping up to help her carry in the dishes of food. Steve's eyes widened desperately at his girlfriend, who kept her expression blank in order to keep up the rouse.

"Hey, now," he played along, holding his hands up, "you're a wonderful host. But I'm afraid I must obey the law!"

"Right answer," Julia confirmed, carrying in a large plate containing the pot roast, while Ringo brought another with mashed potatoes.

"I told you, mother," Ringo shrugged, placing it down and returning to her seat. "We're law-abiding minors. Steve and I spend our days doing entirely legal things, like solving world hunger and definitely *not* drinking at parties."

"Oh no," Julia sighed, concealing a smirk. "I couldn't have a daughter who drinks and smokes weed. I got the kid that grabs an axe and tries to stop inter-whatever monsters."

"Inter-dimensional," Steve offered. "And by the way, Mrs Wheeler, I just wanted you to know that I'd never let anything happen to Ringo. I'd put her first, always."

"Don't worry, kid," Julia nodded, "I've already told Ringo to let you die first if it comes to it."

Although her words were spoken in a serious tone, the trio broke into a round of laughter, delving into the meal the Wheeler mother prepared for them.

"I'm gonna go to the bathroom," Ringo excused herself, wiping her mouth and sliding her chair backwards to leave the table.

Julia waited until she heard the sound of the bathroom door close before speaking again, her serene expression an exact representation of her mood.

"You're good for each other," she commented, a proud look in her eye as she glanced him over. And for her, it was true. Julia didn't like to feed into the narrative that Ringo needed to be saved by someone, but the two played off of each other's characters perfectly - it was of mutual benefit.

It was the only wish she would have asked for as a mother, for her daughter to meet someone who respected her, adored her and was completely frightened by Julia herself.

"Thanks, Julia," Steve murmured, looking towards her with gratitude. As far as 'meeting the mom' went, he assumed this was a successful attempt.

Until of course the serious moment was broke by Julia again, pointing her dinner knife at him across the table.

"Get her pregnant and you'll never use your pecker again," she grinned, almost psychopathically. Steve chuckled to mask his discomfort, but he supposed Julia's humour was something he'd grow accustomed to, now that he was becoming closer with their small, close-knit family.

"Jess'," Ringo rolled her eyes, carefully exiting the car after her friend pulled into park outside of Nancy's, "that's just a rumour. You don't know Miss Snyder and Mr Pendercrast were caught together in the

disability bathroom."

"Why do you have to ruin it?" Jessica scoffed, tucking her hands into her jacket as they approached the front door together. "Let me live, it'll make English so much more interesting imagining him bursting in and declaring his love for her - sweaty pit stains and all."

"Hey, Wheeler!" A voice called from behind, catching the duo's attention. Jessica's eyes bugged out upon seeing Chief Hopper at the end of the driveway, one foot out of his truck, a familiar figure in the passenger seat.

"I'll catch up," Ringo told Jessica, who sauntered onward inside with a shrug. She returned to the bottom of the drive, grinning excitedly at Hopper, who had clearly been won over in letting El leave the house for one night.

"Who's that girl? Why would you invite someone outside of the circle? What if she finds out?" He whisper-shouted, a panicked look in his eyes that could only be described as fatherly worry. Ringo found it rather endearing.

"Oh, Jess?" Ringo pointed over her shoulder with her thumb, "she already knows, she's cool with it." Hopper raised an eyebrow at her choice of words.

"*Cool with it*," he echoed, "are you aware what was in that contract you signed when it told you to *keep your mouth shut*?"

"I had to tell Jessica," Ringo rolled her eyes, "I wasn't risking our friendship for the sake of some conspiracy coverup. We can trust her, she's alright."

"This was a bad idea," he refuted, shaking his head in frustration.

"Oh my god, Chief," Ringo groaned, gesturing through the window for El to exit the car and follow. "We're watching movies, not skewering her over a pit. Jesus, calm down."

"Fine," he huffed, against his own better judgement. "But I'm coming back at eleven thirty, and she better be okay."

"Of course," Ringo deadpanned, "we'll usually have dessert by then, but we may feel a little full up. It's been a while since we had a human sacrifice for dinner."

El cornered the car, an excited grin on her face as she trailed towards Ringo, anxiously waiting to go inside.

Ringo placed a hand on her shoulder and steered them both towards the front entrance, until a final call from Hopper stopped the blonde once again.

"By the way," he began, slipping his Sheriff's hat back on his head comfortably, "it's Jane, now."

Ringo nodded, giving him a small wave before continuing their trek. Giggling as she reached the door knob, she looked down at 'Jane' with furrowed brows.

"I sure hope he's talking about you. I've always seen him as more of a Janice than a Jane."

Multiple parties in the room were acting significantly awkward, which just wasn't sitting right with Ringo Wheeler.

She herself was curled comfortable into Steve's arms, the two taking up a bean bag stashed in the corner of the basement. The kids had formed a circle around the television on the ground, but Jane was on opposite ends to Max - purposefully, Ringo noticed.

Jonathan and Nancy were finally sitting somewhat closer to each other, only reaching that point halfway through the film. They would never be the type of couple to openly display affection, but that was okay. They still liked each other, anyone could see that.

Jessica, meanwhile, was taking up a mound of cushions and blankets in the opposite end of the room, snoring soundly. The film did little to entice her, nor did it engage Ringo, but the latter liked to watch those around her nonetheless.

"You've never had a Coke?" Mike's voice met her ears, as he wore incredulous expression while angling an unopened can towards her.

Jane looked visibly uncomfortable, with the object itself rather than Mike's words.

"Lighten up, dude," Steve called out in her defence, "it's not like she spent all her life in a cell or anything."

"Nice one," Ringo commented drily, "really sensitive."

"Okay," Mike dropped it, reaching for another can of soda instead, "how about 7UP?"

When Jane didn't have the same reaction as before, he took that as a positive sign in passing it to her. Their fingers brushing together caused a slight fumble, leading to the can tumbling out of Mike's grip and rolling in the opposite direction.

"Oh, I've got it," Max called out, gripping onto the metal can and standing up, stepping towards Jane to hand it to her directly.

"Thanks," Jane took it from her hands, still eyeing her wearily, although she was growing steadily more comfortable in her presence than before.

They'll be friends eventually, Ringo thought to herself. She'd make sure of that.

"Oh my god," Dustin whined, tossing an M&M at the screen, "who the hell put this on? We've got to stop letting the girls pick."

"Um!" Nancy voiced, "Steve picked the movie, so watch yourself!"

"Hey! I was just trying to pick something sweet for Max and Jane's first night!"

His mention of their names garnered their attention, the two girls fixing glares directly at him.

"Let's play a game instead?" Lucas suggested.

"Charades?" Jonathan offered, more awake now that everyone's focus was away from the movie.

"God help us," Ringo muttered, climbing off from Steve's lap to find the whiteboard.

There's only two chapters and an epilogue left and I know there's going to be a sequel but I'm still so emotional! It feels like the end of an era because book 2 will be set in Summer 1985, starting a few weeks before Stranger Things 3. Because the new season doesn't start until July, I think there'll be a small break between the books but definitely no more than a month! I've got four books on the go at the minute and I'm reaching the end of my semester so it works out for me as well!

Thanks so much to anyone who read and/or reviewed the last chapter!

Court725 - I can't believe it's one of your favourites! That makes me so happy because I never expect people to like the non-dramatic chapters that are focused purely on character development so thank you! Hope you liked this one too!

Vince Basile Jr - Thanks so much! Hope you like this one and what's to come! x

StrangerThings11HungerGames - Awww I'm so glad you liked it! I love writing in Julia and Jessica with the script, because their relationships with Ringo are soooo important and there's so few good female relationships in stranger things unfortunately! And a sequel is definitely being written!x

candy95 - Yesss, the point of these last few chapters is tying up loose ends because the setting of the sequel will be a little different with Steve and Ringo having graduated high school, I'm glad you liked it!

Ohmicrofilm - Ohhh thank you so much! It means the world that you like it, thanks for taking the time to comment! xx

40. You Just Never Know

"RINGO'S GOT THAT LOOK ON HER FACE," Jessica drily commented, in the midst of tossing peanuts into the air and attempting to catch them in her mouth. Nancy ignored her words, frantically highlighting sections of her notes.

"What look?" Ringo questioned in confusion, her feet placed comfortably on the chair next to her. They were in the library with the intention of doing some hardcore studying, but the only one truly doing anything was Nancy.

"The 'I'm thinking about Steve' look," Jessica rolled her eyes, failing to hear the frustrated clearing of Nancy's throat - a blatant attempt to get them to be quiet.

"Bold of you to assume I'm ever *not* thinking about Steve," Ringo shrugged, doodling squiggles in the margin of her notebook.

"Okay," Nancy huffed, looking up from the table and placing her highlighter down. "There is a reason I didn't invite you guys in the first place to come here, and that's because I wanted to study for my chemistry test in *peace*. Because that is what a library is *for*."

Ringo and Jessica met eyes at her rant, biting their cheeks and covering their mouths to stifle a laugh as the girl returned to her notes. A few moments passed before Jessica got bored again, eyeing the dazed expression Ringo wore.

"I bet you're thinking about doing it," Jessica pointed out, eyebrows furrowing at Ringo's reaction as the blonde visibly stiffened.

"Erm," she stared to reply, shaking her head quickly and avoiding eye contact, "nah. I was just thinking about my mom's cooking, it's pizza night. That's *basically* sex, though."

"Oh my god," Jessica eyed her carefully, a wry smile lifting up her lips. Nancy once again slammed down the highlighter, ready to chew them out for disrupting. "You guys haven't done it yet."

"Really, guys-" Nancy began, before breaking off to look at Ringo incredulously, "wait, you guys haven't done it?"

"What?" Ringo laughed nervously, giving away all her usual telltale signs of lying. Eyes darting from left to right, random chuckles. "Are you *kidding*? We do it all the time! Like rabbits! So much that we had to stop before my upper half disconnected from my lower half!"

"I can't believe you two haven't done it yet," Jessica snickered. "With how close you are I thought you'd have done it before you were even officially together."

"Steve and I done it before we were officially together," Nancy chimed in.

"Thanks," Ringo sarcastically drawled, "I remember! I was freakin' downstairs!"

She dropped her pen with a clang, slumping forward with a downtrodden expression as she gave up her rouse. It wasn't a lie, they really *hadn't* done it. Seeing as December was finally upon them, Ringo and Steve had been official for almost six weeks. It wasn't even that long of a time, but given both Ringo and Steve's history, she assumed it'd have happened already.

It wasn't like they were completely abstinent, but the build up had been going on for so long now that they were almost nervous to initiate anything, in case it didn't live up to their heightened expectations.

"I just don't know what to do," she ranted, "I've never been in a serious relationship. I don't know how these things go."

"Well, the boyfriend whips out his sexual organ with which to promptly penetrate you- but not before smartly covering it with a-" Jessica was cut off by a pen being flung directly at her.

"Shut up!" The blonde rolled her eyes.

"Look, sometimes these things just happen slower than others. It'll happen at the right time, just go with the flow and don't stress," Nancy consoled her, placing a comforting hand on her elbow. She

truly was the mediator of their group, always the levelheaded source of advice.

"Exactly," Jessica agreed with a nod. "Stop stressing, you'll make it ten times harder if you overthink it."

"I just don't want him to get bored," she admitted insecurely, cheeks flushing red at the confession.

"Bored?" Nancy scoffed. "Of you? Steve is so head over heels for you he'd carry you from here to Timbuktu just so you could see the sights."

"Yeah," Jessica smirked with amusement, "and when it happens, you won't like it. Because he's straight, and white. And a man. But overtime, your acting abilities will become so well-rehearsed, you'll even convince *yourself* that you're actually enjoying it."

"You're such a bitch," Ringo breathed a laugh, already feeling less nervous about the situation with her friends reassurances. Nancy caught their attention again, when she suddenly shut her notebook with a sigh.

"There's no point, I'm never going to concentrate with you two around," she complained, leaning back comfortably in her chair. "I have to work at that Snow Ball Dance tonight too."

"Gross," Ringo screwed up her expression. "Doing what? Making sure they keep their hands on each other's shoulders? You cockblock."

"They're kids, Ringo? And no, dishing out some punch."

"Good luck with that," Jessica chuckled. "Every preteen boy in there will be leaving his date on the bleachers to talk to you. Or every girl, let's not forget our lesbian prodigies."

"Inclusivity queen over here," Ringo teased with a smirk.

"Someone has to think of them if you straight girls won't," Jessica bantered in return, leaning back in her chair with her arms over her chest.

"Hey, I never said I was straight," Ringo held her hands up in defence.

"Oh yeah!" Jessica gasped dramatically, pointing as if realising something. "I forgot about your lesbian girlfriend, Steve."

The group dissolved into giggles after that, closing their notepads and recapping their pens as they decided no work was going to be done with this lack of motivation.

"Ringo, come on!" Steve hollered from his open car window, peering out as she teetered down the steps in front of her apartment. Ringo narrowed her eyes in response, expression morphing into a frown when saw a curly mop of hair in the passenger seat.

Leaning down to look through Steve's window, she raised an eyebrow and pointed to the back.

"Get in the back Dustin, you're the kid," she demanded, much to his displeasure.

"Oh come *on*, Ringo!" He groaned, looking rather dapper with his suit and quaffed hair. "I wanna look cool getting out of the car, not looking like my parents just gave me a ride! Please!"

"Fine, Jesus," she rolled her eyes, opening the back door and clambering inside. "No need to be such a lil bitch."

Steve had offered to give Dustin a ride to the dance, the newfound companionship between them forever bringing warmth to Ringo's heart. Of course, she couldn't help but tag along when she heard that Dustin was dressing up.

"Hey," Steve defended, smirking in amusement. "Cut the kid some slack, he's nervous to show off his new bad boy persona."

"Dustin, you're hardly bad you once stuck your fingers through an electric fence to save a trapped caterpillar," the blonde rolled her eyes.

"As opposed to what?" Dustin exclaimed. "Leaving him to *die*?"

After a few moments of comfortable silence, the Henderson boy twisted in his seat to look around at Ringo again, a mischievous look in his eye.

"So," he began, straightening up his jacket, "you sure you don't wanna come in with me? You'd be the hottest girl there, especially on my arm."

"Slow your roll, Tom Cruise," she chuckled.

"Hey," Steve held his hand out, the other remaining on the wheel, "leave my girlfriend out of this, you're already trying to win another girl you don't need mine too."

"Max?" Ringo questioned confusedly, grimacing at the blush arising on Dustin's cheeks. *Oh no*, she thought. Max very clearly seemed to like Lucas at the minute, but perhaps she was wrong.

Never mind, she thought. She was never wrong.

Steve pulled up in front of the school, which was already lively with students walking in and out, the sound of music vibrating through the air. Pulling the car into park, the blonde unbuckled her seat belt and leaned into the front, fixing a twirl of his air that had misplaced.

"Hey," Dustin groaned, batting her hand away.

"Oh let me fix you up," she rolled her eyes, tugging at his shirt collar and rubbing at a persistent piece of dirt on his face. When finally satisfied, she leaned back to get a full look at him, hands cupping over her chest with pride.

"Look at him," she awed, wiping away a non-existent tear. "They grow up so fast. Flash me the gnashers."

Dustin did his signature purr, showcasing his gummy smile and eliciting a giggle from her.

"Maybe don't do that inside," Steve warned, biting back a laugh. "So remember, when you get in there..."

"Pretend like I don't care," Dustin finished for him, giving him a nod

of acceptance.

"You don't care."

"I don't care."

"There you go, you're learning, my friend."

"I don't approve of this message," Ringo voiced with narrowed eyes. "Steve's don't care attitude was for a meaningless 'wham, bam, thank you ma'am.' If you genuinely have feelings for someone, you don't act like they're not there."

"Don't listen to her," Steve shook his head. "She's a girl."

"Exactly!" She waved her hands in annoyance. "Dustin's not exactly trying to impress a guy is he? Not that there's anything wrong with that, of course."

"I'm taking Steve's advice," Dustin shrugged. "Sorry, Ringo. He managed to get you, he's doing something right."

"Exactly," Steve agreed, flashing her a proud grin.

"Oh, he didn't get me by pretending not to care," she rolled her eyes.

"Uh, yes I did."

"If you say so," she played off, a wry smirk appearing on her lips afterward. "Hey Steve, do you think you might be able to carry my school bag tomorrow? I've had a really bad back lately..."

"Yeah, no problem babe."

"A-ha!" She shouted loudly, causing them both to jump. "I *told* you!"

Dustin ignored their antics, choosing instead to focus on his reflection in the rear view mirror above them as he nervously prodded his hair.

"Hey," Steve tutted when he noticed, slapping his hand over the mirror to hide the reflection. "Come on man, you look great, okay? You look great."

"So handsome!" Ringo chimed in, leaning in from the back to peck an encouraging kiss against his cheek that left him red-faced and giggly.

"You're gonna go in there-" Steve began.

"Yeah, you're gonna go right up in there!" Ringo added.

"And look like a million bucks!"

"Look like a million *freakin'* bucks!"

"And you're gonna slay em dead!"

"Dead, dead!" Ringo continued, beaming excitedly as Dustin seemed to relax under their encouragements.

"Like a lion," he purred again, much to Steve's chagrin. When he finally left the car and booked it inside, Ringo and Steve watched on like proud parents, hoping that whether or not he managed to 'get the girl', he'd have a good time anyway.

Ringo climbed in from the back seat through to the front shakily, Steve's hand reaching out for her to grab onto until she manoeuvred forward. When she got to sit down, her eyes refocused on the dance, almost full of envy for the experiences she knew the kids would be having.

"I never went to these kind of things," she admitted sadly, tone less excitable than before.

"What?" Steve asked in surprise.

"Yeah, nobody ever asked me and I didn't want the only person who did ask to come pick me up at a trailer park," she revealed, forcing a smile onto her lips to ease the tension, something she always did when talking about things that affected her.

"Well we can't have that can we?" Steve asked, leaning over and resting his hand on her knee as he took off driving again.

"Where are we going?" She questioned curiously.

"Somewhere," was his cryptic response, smirking wickedly as if he had a secret. "I have something to tell you as well."

They had arrived at an empty field Ringo felt she had been to before, but couldn't quite place a finger on. Steve pulled into park, leaving his headlights on and clambering out of the car, waiting for her to follow.

"Where are we?" She asked, getting out of the car and slamming the door shut.

"You don't remember?" He gasped over-dramatically. "This is the field where we had that bonfire over a year ago. Remember? The night we met."

"Oh yeah!" She realised, leaning her back against the closed door as Steve returned inside the car and fumbled around with the glove compartment, a quick glance through the window and she saw he was flicking through cassette tapes.

"Back when you were a 'big-bird looking motherfucker'," she sighed wistfully at the memory. They really had come a long way from snide remarks and glares.

"I don't remember you saying that?" He hummed.

"Oh, I said it."

"Anyways," he went on, finally finding the right tape and taking it out of its box, shoving it into his tape deck and turning the volume knob around.

Any Way You Want It by Journey began to flood through the car speakers, catching her by surprise. Steve came around to her side of the car, grinning excitedly.

"I remember they played this at all the dances I went to when I was their age," he told her, holding his hand out towards her. "And now that we've found out your life is sadder than the Elephant Man," he paused as she let out a loud laugh. "Now you have to dance with me."

"Well, I never turn down a dance," she shrugged, sliding her hand into his as the chorus began to hit.

They could have made it a cheesy romance-worthy scene, slow dancing in a field to a classic tune while they gazed into each other's eyes. But they weren't a cheesy romance movie, they were Steve and Ringo.

Steve was spinning Ringo around and around by her hand until she felt nauseous, her hair flipping around wildly and feet occasionally stumbling over the other. Eventually he let go of her hand to bust a few moves of his own, shimmying his hips and making circles with his hands. Ringo burst out laughing at the sight, her amusement catching onto Steve as well.

By the time the song finished, they were both red-faced and panting, stumbling toward the hood of the car to sit down on and relax for a moment.

"You're a dork, Steve Harrington," she chuckled again, blonde hair fanning out on the windshield as she lay against it. He sat up at her words, eyes remaining fixated on her face. It was now or... well not never, but certainly not in the immediate future.

"Hey Ringo?" He prompted, catching her attention.

"Hmmm?"

"I just wanted to say..." his voice faded away, the slight nervousness in his tone causing her to sit up as well.

"What?" She asked worriedly. He stared at her for a moment longer, and the nerves began to wash away. This was Ringo, after all. He would never have any reason to be insecure in front of her.

"I loke- goddamn it! I did it again!" He shook his head in frustration, completely ruining the moment as she let out a howl of laughter once more.

He let her continue on until her chuckles calmed down, playfully shoving her by the arm.

"I'm sorry," she wiped underneath her eye. "Do continue."

"I love you! Alright!" He shouted, just happy to finally be able to say the word without fumbling over it. He kept his eyes on her, searching for any sign of a negative thought or reaction. But her grin only widened, if that was possible, as she leaned in and pressed her lips against his in a quick, but reassuring kiss.

"I love you too," she admitted, the words enough to lift the weight of the world off his shoulders. "Thank god you said it, I was starting to think I was in the friendzone."

"We are literally dating."

"Hey, you never know."

Steve rolled his eyes teasingly and leaned in to cup her cheeks with his cold hands, pressing a kiss to the tip of her nose before meeting her lips again.

They broke away after a few seconds, his eyebrows furrowing when she saw she suddenly had a nervous demeanour.

"I'm ready to have sex if you are!" She suddenly yelled, looking everywhere but at him.

"What?" He sputtered, "here?!"

"No! Not here, Christ it's Winter and I'm not doing it in your car. That's where the kids sit," she huffed, cheeks flaming red with humiliation.

"Good, because I think we'd crack a windshield if we did it here," he sniggered, concerned again when he noticed her bite her lip nervously. "Where did that come from?"

"I just..." she sighed, tucking her blonde hair behind her ears. "I don't want you to get bored of me thinking I don't want sex. I do, I just don't know when it's the right time."

"Ringo, if I wanted you for sex I'd have left a long time ago because you're that much of a handful," he teased, smiling when she saw her

fight to hide a smile. For reassurance, he pressed another kiss to her forehead. "When it's the right time, then it'll happen. Stop pressuring yourself. I just told you I am in *love* with you."

He spoke the words proudly, still sounding foreign coming from his mouth to Ringo's ears. She searched his eyes for any hint of a lie, but couldn't detect any. The thought made her almost want to cry. She never expected to find someone like Steve in her whole life, much less to love and be loved by him.

Even after all she had been through in her life, she'd go through it all again if it meant she could end up feeling this way forever.

Steve lay back against the car once more, tugging her down to curl into his side for warmth. A trip to an open field in December may not have been a particularly good idea he realised, it would surely snow any day now.

"So," she smirked wryly, leaning up on elbow and chuckling lowly, "I heard you have feelings for me."

"Once again," he sighed, "we are literally dating and I literally just said I love you."

"Hmm, you never know."

There's literally one chapter left and then an epilogue and I'm starting to get emotional. (Yes, there's a sequel coming but STILL.)

This might be one of my favourite chapters. From the iconic girl group to the Charlie's Angels to some Steve/Ringo time, I just loved writing it and I hope you all like reading it!

Thanks so much for reading!

StrangerThings11HungerGames - I'm so glad you do! A lot of the time people don't even really respond to the main character when it's an OC, nevermind the other OCs I've introduced (Jessica and Julia). So glad you liked it thank you so much for commenting! Hope you like this one! xx

candy95 - Me too! I'm genuinely a little emotional which is ridiculous but I've become so attached to them I think I've set the bar too high any future relationships I may have ahaha. Glad you liked it thank you!

Vince Basile Jr - Thank you so much for commenting as always, it really encourages me when it comes to writing the next chapter! Hope you liked this one and have a wonderful day!

harleyquinn87- No worries at all thanks for reading this book in the first place! x

41. Road Trippy

"IF AT ANY POINT HE GOES OVER THE SPEED LIMIT," Julia began, walking quickly alongside her daughter as they made their way to the front entrance, "call the cops."

"I can't *call the cops* on my boyfriend, Mom," the blonde huffed, a large duffle bag of clothes over her shoulder.

"See, its that kind of mentality that gets girls killed. I don't care how pretty he is, you'll find another fish in the pond," she was saying as they exited the front door, running into Steve - who was making his way inside to see if Ringo needed help with her bag.

"You trying to get Ringo to dump me again, Mrs Wheeler?" He grinned with amusement, holding his hand out for Ringo's bag to politely place it in the trunk. Julia crossed her arms over her chest, a smirk playing with her lips.

"Of course not!" She denied. "If she didn't have you, *I'd* have to drive her everywhere."

Steve shook his head with humour as he rounded the car and got into the driver's seat, leaving the mother and daughter outside for a quick goodbye before the trip.

"Mom," Ringo hesitated, "you can come with us, you know?" I know you have work, but-

"No, no," she waved off, placing a comforting hand on her daughter's shoulder. "I said my goodbyes to your dad before we left Florida. This is your chance now."

Ringo nodded meekly. Despite the fact a three day road trip with Steve Harrington across four states seemed like a dream, she wasn't looking forward to what would meet her at the end of their destination.

Tomorrow would mark the one year anniversary of her father's death, and it was a better time than any to say the goodbye she never got to

before leaving. Upon hearing that his girlfriend planned on taking a series of buses down to Orlando, Steve had put his foot down. He had suggested driving, not just to ensure she was safe, but to make something of the trip and hopefully distract her.

And although Julia would never admit it, hearing his suggestion had only solidified her love for him, as her daughter's boyfriend. She herself wasn't able to take off work to drive Ringo, with the hectic shifts leading up to Christmas.

The two blondes hugged for a moment, before Ringo broke away and gave her a short wave, climbing in and buckling her seatbelt.

"Are we ready, commander?" Steve asked, shifting the car into drive and preparing to take off. Thankfully, he had the heat in his car blasting warm air, to contrast with the bitter cold outside.

"Ooooh, kinky," she smirked suggestively, reaching for the glove compartment filled with his cassette tapes. A road trip wasn't a road trip without some stellar tunes, after all. She managed to locate his copy of Queen's *News of the World* album, slipping it into the player quickly.

"What made you think the driver wasn't the one in charge of music?" He scoffed, switching his gaze between watching the road and watching her movements.

"You should trust my music tastes, and if my mother heard you were sorting tapes instead of driving she'd hang you by your balls," Ringo chuckled to herself. As the opening chords of *We Will Rock You* started, she lifted her legs up to rest on the dashboard and smacked her hands gently against her thighs to the beats.

Steve beamed once he recognised the song, patting his fingers against the steering wheel as well.

"Fair enough," he called out to be heard over the music. "By the way, can you keep an eye on the map? I marked out the route ahead."

"Where is it?"

"Your big ass sat on it when you got inside," he laughed to show he

was merely teasing. Ringo rolled her eyes and lifted herself up just enough to grab the sheet she hadn't realised she sat on. Sure enough, when she pulled it out, her hands unveiled a large map that had a red marker joining Hawkins and Orlando.

"Hey, be nice to me. My dad's dead," she stated deadpan, watching with satisfaction as his face turned to one of horror. At the sound of her booming laughter, he relaxed and realised she was simply joking.

Ringo had a dark sense of humour, and her darkest jokes were about things she cared about the most. A defence mechanism, of sorts.

"I brought snacks as well," she leaned down and lifted up the smaller bag of junk food and candy she had scavenged from the corner shop for their journey ahead. It would be six or seven hours of driving today, before stopping at a motel to sleep soundly for a night, then completing the last leg of travelling the next day. She estimated it would be around late afternoon when they would arrive at the graveyard, if nothing went wrong, of course.

"Good, you can hand feed me while I drive," he poked fun, one hand resting on the wheel while he reached his free hand out to intertwine their fingers while he was driving on a straight road.

"I wouldn't hand feed you on your deathbed," she huffed, giving his fingers a light squeeze.

"So, Jonathan finally asked Nancy on a date," Ringo grinned excitedly as she suddenly remembered the news, after spending a prolonged period of time staring out the window at parking lot of the KFC they were eating at.

"No way," Steve chuckled, shaking his head around a mouthful of chicken, "I never thought I'd see the day he'd finally ask."

"At this point, I was expecting Nancy to be the one to ask *him*," she shrugged, wiping her greasy fingers on a napkin.

"They had sex and they're not even together, we haven't even had sex and we've been together nearly two months," he set down the bone-

chewed chicken wing, reaching for his Coke and taking a long slurp.

"Thanks for pointing that out, I'm now happy to wait another two months," she nodded along with a fake smile, reaching for her drink to take a sip of her own.

"Why does my mouth always get me in trouble?" He groaned, wiping his hands on another clean napkin before reaching for his wallet in his pocket.

"True, life would be so much easier if you didn't talk," she sighed wistfully, standing up as they gathered their trash for a nearby bin.

Steve relaxed his arm on her shoulders as they walked outside, fishing around in his pockets for the keys. They ended up stopping halfway through the lot as the teenager went into a mild panic, patting every one of his pockets for the car keys.

"What is it?" She asked, picking up on his suddenly tense posture. After one more check, he suddenly looked to her with a grimace.

"I can't find the keys."

"You what now?" She asked calmly, assuring herself it was merely a matter of misplacing them or leaving them on the table inside. Until Ringo quickly glanced around at the remaining cars. "Steve... where's the car?"

Steve whipped around on the spot, eyes bugged out as he searched the lot for his prized vehicle.

"I... I can't find the car either."

"It's stolen?!" She shrieked, turning around once again as if it would magically appear in the spot they left it before.

"Goddamn it!" He panicked, scraping his fingers through his hair with stress. Steve was only ever willing to mess up his hair in the most dire of situations. "What are we gonna do?! We're in the middle of Tennessee!"

"I'm going to have to sell my clothes for food," she whispered in a

panicked voice. "I'll never see my family and friends again."

"Don't be so dramatic, there's a payphone right there," he rolled his eyes, stomping towards the rather crusty looking phone booth that was a couple feet away. Upon reaching it, he shuffled the coins in his pocket around and lifted the phone to his ear. Waiting a second, Steve returned the coins and slowly turned around to face his girlfriend.

"Well?"

"There's no dial tone."

"Was I Hitler in my past life? Is that why this shit always happens to me?" She questioned, a dazed look in her eyes.

"Come on, don't worry," he clasped her shoulders comfortingly. "I saw another payphone at the gas station down the street. We'll walk down and then call the cops, okay?"

"Okay," she groaned, following after him as they set off down the street, for what was sure to be at least a twenty minute walk.

"My feet hurt," Ringo whined childishly. Much to both Steve's chagrin and amusement.

"I'm not carrying you, it's been ten minutes," he chuckled despite his sour mood, knowing that's what she was hinting at.

Steve loved his BMW with a fiery passion. So much so, he was willing to risk his relationship with his girlfriend if it meant not letting her drive it. Letting Ringo near the wheel of his car was like putting a hairdryer on the side of the bath and hoping it wouldn't fall in.

"Steve," she stopped suddenly, eyes fixated on something ahead.

"I'm *not* carrying you!" He re-iterated, not realising she had stopped in her step.

"No, Steve-"

"I love you, I do, but I wouldn't carry my own mother to Bethlehem

to birth Jesus."

"Look, you idiot!" She ran forward to catch up, smacking on his arm to get his attention onto the object she was staring at.

"Oh my god," he ducked down with a gasp, in case anyone saw him. The house was alone on the dirt road, but nothing looked lonelier than his car sitting out the front of it.

"Those bitches!" She cursed, standing up straight and stomping forward towards the lot. "I'm getting my axe from the trunk!"

"Ringo, stop!" Steve whisper shouted, gripping her arm and dragging her back down to crouch behind the bushes. "We need a plan here!"

"I had a plan, my plan was to cut a bitch," she ranted, unable to get over the audacity of someone to steal their car and park a mere ten minutes away.

"Jail time sounds fun and all but Christmas is my favourite season and I'm not missing seeing Gremlins at the movies because you're in prison for assault," he warned her, eyes darting around the house for any sign of movement. He wondered if the keys were still in the car, and remembered that not everyone was as stupid as he was to leave them there.

"Okay, I have a plan," he started off, eyes darting between the car and the front door. "I'm going to sneak in through the back and you're going to ring the doorbell and distract him."

"That's probably very degrading," she sighed, "but I brought really nice underwear and I'll be damned if someone else is wearing my pretty panties tonight instead."

"Really?" He asked, momentarily distracted. "So... about these underwear-"

"Shut up," she laughed breathily, shoving his shoulder and standing up as she began to pace towards the front entrance. While she did that, Steve slipped towards the open window at the side of the house, suddenly realising the danger involved in what they were doing. Perhaps he shouldn't have asked Ringo to get involved. If there was a

group inside, they were toast.

Spreading flat against the wall next to the window, he leaned in slightly, just enough to peer inside and gauge the number of people. It was actually a rather nice house, and he wondered why they didn't bother just simply buying a car like his.

He saw only saw one figure inside, a male, who got up to answer the door at the sound of the doorbell. Steve was also beginning to realise how stupid he was to think that the keys would be within plain sight.

"Hey!" Ringo's voice carried through the room. The blonde had adopted a wide grin, cocking her hip to the side and looking the man up and down. If movies taught her anything, it was that if she was going to be hyper-sexualised she was damn well going to milk it for her own benefit.

"Can I help you?" He crossed his arms over his chest, eyes full of suspicion. The man didn't particularly appear all that dangerous, except for the way he looked at Ringo, almost like he was ready to snap any second.

Steve slipped inside the adjacent window, eyes fixated on the gleaming silver of his car key - which had been left on the coffee table where the man originally sat across from. The window frame wasn't exactly designed to accommodate for all 5 foot 10 inches of his body, so his entrance was mere centimetres from falling flat on his face.

"My car broke down, its just down the street. Is there any way you could give me a jump?" She paused with a dramatic gasp, then covering her mouth with her hand to pretend to hide her giggles. "Oh, you know what I meant!"

"Well," the corners of his lips lifted into a smirk, visibly relaxing and giving her a once over again as if he suddenly had a new first impression of her. "Who am I not to help out a little lady in trouble?"

Steve grappled for the keys. In his panicked haste, his elbow hit off of a vase that was placed nearby, knocking it over. As if it were happening in slow motion, Steve could only stare wide-eyed as the

rather plain ornament tipped and smashed against the ground, breaking into smithereens. Even worse, accompanying the shards of ceramic were little tiny pills.

Steve may have left his keys in his car, but he knew drugs when he seen them. And judging by their quantity and strategic hiding place, he guessed this wasn't just a casual user. This was a *dealer's* house.

The owner whipped around at the sound, prompting Steve to whirl on the spot, stomping on all sorts of things as he practically dived for the open window and hurtled through it. He landed with a groan in the bushes underneath, but fuelled by the sudden adrenaline kick, swiftly hopped back up.

"What the *fuck*?" The man roared after whipping around to find the intruder. Reacting on instinct, Ringo flew her boot-covered foot forward and connected it with his crotch with a sickening thud.

"Run, baby!" Steve was shouting as he made a mad dash towards the front entrance, where both Ringo and the car were. "Run!"

"Yeah, motherfucker, you stole from the *wrong*-" Ringo was in the midst of pointing at the thief, until Steve's arm wrapped around her waist and she was hauled towards the car.

They leaped inside the car, Steve barely closing his door before starting up the engine. Groans of pain and shuffling were heard from the front door, prompting Ringo to start smacking her hand against the dashboard.

"Go! Go! Go!"

With a screech from his tyres, Steve pulled out of the drive and narrowly missed the front wall, peeling away from the lot and stepping his foot down firmly on the gas until they were out of sight.

"Ugh, Steve?" Ringo called out hesitantly, eyes trailing around the car. "I don't think this is your car..."

"*What?*!" He all but roared, the car swerving slightly on the road from the shock of her words.

"Kidding, I'm just so pumped!" She laughed, practically jumping in her seat with giddiness.

"*Pumped?!*" He echoed, placing one hand over his chest and feeling his heart thumping through. "He was a drug dealer, Ringo! I would never have done that if I knew! He could come after us!"

"I'll just kick him in the balls again," she waved off, opening the glove compartment to find a song that matched the powerful feeling she felt. Cheap Trick seemed like a good shot.

"Jesus Christ!" She shouted suddenly, as along with the tapes haphazardly shoved in the compartment, there was now also a large, plastic-covered block of white powder.

"Fuck!" Steve yelled, "get rid of it!"

Ringo rolled down her window before he could question her actions, and practically shot-put the drugs through the air into the ditch.

When she rolled the window back up, the shock of the situation was finally starting to settle in, and her heart began to race.

"Holy crap, I just kicked a drug dealer in the balls."

The rest of the trip was fairly uneventful in comparison, with the only notable event being their first time sharing a bed together. It was awkward, and Ringo was a sleep-kicker, Steve discovered. But it was nice, they didn't spend all night cuddling or spooning, but the comfort of having the other beside them lulled them into a deep sleep.

Sun was already beginning to set when they arrived at the graveyard. The weather was colder than she remembered for December in Florida, but it only served to remind her this wasn't a happy visit.

Ringo wasn't coming to her father's home for dinner, to catch him up on her life in Indiana and let him meet her boyfriend Steve. Ringo was coming to a graveyard, to talk to a headstone and hope that *somewhere* he was able to hear her.

"I'll let you do this one alone," Steve whispered to her after opening her car door, pulling her in for an engulfing hug before sending her on her way. She walked slowly towards the grave - this would be the first time she 'talked' to him since his death.

"So," she began, after a moment of silence, stuffing her cold hands into her coat pockets. "I think I just realised today that you're actually dead. I mean, I obviously knew, but it never really sunk in. I got so used to not talking to you after what happened at school that I just felt like you were still giving me the silent treatment.

"But no, you're dead. You're not going to be there when I graduate school, or to walk me down the aisle if I ever get married. You're not going to congratulate me when I *finally* get my license, or scare Steve into never leaving me. And I thought I was going to be okay with that because of what you said to me. But I'm not."

Taking a shaky breath and blinking away the tears that started to rise, she crouched down, eyes fixated on the name carved into stone.

"I don't think I could ever forgive you for not being there for me after the picture thing," she continued to ramble. "But I think I'm able to move on from it. I mean, if you hadn't sent me to Hawkins I wouldn't be here, right? Anyways, what I really wanted to say was that... I love you. And I miss you, daddy. And I'm so sorry I didn't tell you that before you died."

Steve sat watching from the driver's seat, eyebrows furrowing in concern when he saw that she was returning already. Exiting the car, he met her at the hood.

"What's wrong?" He asked quietly, cupping his hands around her shoulders. Surprisingly, her expression was rather calm, although her eyes were reddened.

"Nothing," she shook her head, smiling tiredly. "I don't think I need to sit with him and tell him every aspect of my life. If he's out there... I'm sure he knows. I just needed to come here and-... and come to his grave. For the first time."

Steve silently wrapped his arms around her again, allowing her to

bury her head against his chest and breathe deeply to contain sobs that threatened to rise, while he calmly rubbed her back.

"He'd be proud of you," Steve whispered in her ear. "How many fathers can say their daughters regularly kick demon ass? I bet he's taking bets in Heaven with all the other guys on who's got the most badass kid."

"Well," she slowly revealed her face again, forcing an amused smirk to lift her lips, "I have been known to handle myself well."

"Handle myself well," he echoed, one arm resting around her shoulders while he led her to the passenger side, "I think Billy Hargrove had to get his head checked after you bludgeoned him with a lamp."

"I don't know *watt* you're talking about," she grinned at her own joke while climbing inside the car, her words eliciting an eye roll from Steve.

THIS IS IT. THE FINAL CHAPTER. BUT the epilogue is still coming in a few days, and that'll be more like a chapter so technically this is like the second last chapter.

After the epilogue, an author's note will be published with details about the sequel and a thank you note, I really hope everyone reads it even though I'll probably be emotionally unstable in it!

Thanks so much for reading, WAIT for the epilogue please!

JosieoftheRose - *sniffs* I love YOU for loving these dorks

Court725 - It makes me soooo happy that you like Jessica and Ringo's insertion into Dustin and Steve's friendship. It's almost two of the most intimidating things to write - a likeable extra OC that isn't in the show and isn't the protagonist, and adding a character into a dynamic that already works so well. Thank you so much for being so kind and for supporting this book for so long, I hope you like this chapter, the epilogue and the eventual

sequel to come! x

RedVelvetPanPan - I LOVE THAT YOU LOVED IT. SERIOUSLY. thank you so much for commenting your opinion it truly means the world!

candy95 - So so happy you like Jessica being integrated! She's going to be more of an important character in the sequel/season 3. Deviated from the main plot for this final chapter, but I've got one word for the epilogue: CHRISTMAS.

Vince Basile Jr - Thank you so so much as always, and I'd also like to thank you for always supporting this book even when some chapters weren't as good as others. It always helps me to write when I receive encouragement like you've given me and I'm just happy I was able to write a couple and a story that you actually like. Thank you! x

StrangerThings11HungerGames- I completely agree about Nancy! Eleven now will have Max, but Nancy never connected with another girl after Barb and I love being able to add to her character in this story. As much as everyone loves her with Jonathan, I think there's so much potential to develop female characters when they have friends because that's when they're most like themselves. AGHHH STOP I'M SO SAD THAT THIS IS ENDING. I just wanted to say from the bottom of my heart thank you for always hyping this story up, you're an absolute delight and your comments always make my day! I wish you all the best and I hope you like the epilogue coming in a few days!x

Harleyquinn87 - I've loved reading your comments as you caught up! Thanks so much for sharing your reactions! I think you were one of the first people to start reading this book when I started it and it took a while to get to where it is now, people like you really encouraged and helped me continue when I doubted if it was good or not. So thank you so much and have a wonderful day!

42. Epilogue

THE DOORBELL PIERCED THROUGH THE EXCITED CHATTER OF THE WHEELER HOUSEHOLD, prompting Karen to nod towards her son to open the front door and invite their guests inside. Mike lazily got up with a huff, but he couldn't complain today - his parents just bought him a BMX bike for his Christmas present.

Opening the door, he was greeted with two smiling blondes, who broke into eerily similar grins at the sight of his rather festive sweater.

"You look like Christmas threw up on you," Ringo snickered, her mother slapping her arm in protest but still hiding giggles of her own.

"Shut up, Ringo. Mom made me wear it," he rolled his eyes, leaving the door open for them to come inside and trailing back into the living room. They each had bags between them, filled with presents for their extended family. Perhaps they had gone overboard, but Julia and Ringo hadn't celebrated Christmas with anyone for nine years.

They entered the room rather sheepishly, both worrying that they were intruding on private family time. Rather comically, the same sweater had been forced upon every member of the house, making them look like a Christmas infomercial. Or a horrific pop band releasing a Christmas anthem.

"Julia, Ringo!" Karen stood up giddily, gesturing with her hands for them to come further in and sit down. "We're so glad you could come, dinner will be ready in an hour!"

Settling the bag down next to the tree, Ringo immediately gravitated towards Nancy, who was clutching a box of brand new hot curlers in hand. Julia still felt rather awkward, and chose to sit in a free armchair by herself. She noticed how easily Ringo fit into the family, being so familiar with them. But she was also a blood relative - and Julia was merely the wife of their deceased brother/uncle.

Picking up on her mother's discomfort, Ringo decided to strike up a conversation to get her involved.

"We brought presents, as payment for not having to cook a turkey!"

"Ringo can't handle looking at uncooked meat," Julia rolled her eyes in amusement, "it's almost a phobia at this point."

"Only psychopaths can handle a carcass with ease, *mother*," she spoke with a flat tone, eyes narrowing dramatically.

"You didn't need to bring anything!" Karen insisted, but she smiled widely all the same with Holly balanced on her hip. Ted was nearly dozing off in the corner, likely having guzzled too much mulled wine.

As presents were divided out and happily opened, Karen handed a smaller one to Holly, pointing towards Julia for the girl to give to. Teetering across the room, Holly childishly smiled as she handed the wrapped box towards the blonde, who looked up in surprise. She hadn't expected to be included in their gift giving, and was feeling rather emotional upon opening the box to find a beautiful necklace inside.

When she met Karen's gaze again, the woman dropped her left eye in a sneaky wink.

"Oh my fuck!" Mike swore, waking up Ted up instantly to glare at his son. "It's a mint condition Spider-Man issue 50! Only Dustin was able to get one of these!"

Ringo smirked at his words as she sipped on a glass of eggnog, keeping her gaze cast down.

"How did you get it?" He whirled around to Ringo, the most giddy she had ever seen him.

"I got it from Dustin," she shrugged casually.

"He said he'd never part from it, no matter how much we paid him," Mike answered sceptically, rechecking the comic in case it was incidentally missing half the pages.

"He gave it to me for free? He said all I had to do was hug him."

"What an adorable boy," Karen awed, the adults in the room nodding

in agreement while Mike shivered with disgust. Dustin's intentions were far from innocent, that he knew.

Ringo smiled at the sight of her mother chatting animatedly with Karen, glad to see they were hitting it off. Her mother needed more friends in Hawkins if they were staying permanently, and she couldn't wait to introduce her to Joyce Byers.

A knock on the door rang out, and Ringo skipped up to answer it, having a fair idea of who it could be. She had asked the Wheelers if Steve could join their celebrations after hearing his own family dinner had been disastrous. He was due to arrive later anyway, as were all the teenagers. The plan had been to go down to the basement, like it was yet another Wheeler family Friday. But Steve needed to escape quicker.

The second he saw a blonde head of hair appear through the glass on the front door, Steve sighed in relief, barely wasting a second after it opened to lean down and kiss her. She was taken aback at first, but eventually melted under his touch, his hands coming up to cup her cheeks. Steve placed a series of short pecks on her lips, before wrapping his arms around to hug her.

"God, I've missed you," he sighed, letting go of his girlfriend to shut the door and close them off from the Wintery breeze.

"Wow, needy," she scoffed playfully, leaning up to press a kiss to his cheek nonetheless.

Together, they re-entered the living room to prying eyes. Julia, Mike and Nancy were accustomed to the sight of the two of them together, but Karen and Ted found it rather jarring. Especially given Nancy's own history with him.

They settled into a love seat in the corner, until Ringo got up and scurried towards the tree to fetch his present.

"Isn't that your boyfriend?" Ted muttered to Nancy, baffled by the display.

"Nah, I was keeping him warm for her," Nancy shrugged, until her Dad's silence indicated he took her comment seriously. "Kidding!"

Ringo grinned once she saw the familiar rectangle, tied with a tiny bow on top. She clutched it in her hand, excitedly returning to the seat and presenting it to her boyfriend. Steve had a present of his own for Ringo, and he couldn't wait to see her reaction.

Carefully tugging off the wrapping and the red string, his lips lifted into a wide grin as he unveiled a cassette tape, words scribbled on the cover sheet in a very familiar fashion to them.

'Songs for when you love Steve Harrington,' it read.

"Goddamn it," he shook his head with adoration as he looked back at her, "I love you."

She accepted the kiss he tenderly placed on her forehead, warmed by his reaction. Ringo wasn't the richest of her friends - in fact, she was probably the worst off financially. But that wouldn't stop her from making efforts to make her friends, and boyfriend, happy.

"If I play this and there's nothing on it, I swear-" he threatened, her loud laugh cutting him off.

"I'm not that bad, Harrington," Ringo playfully shoved his arm before settling in and laying her head against his shoulder.

"Clearly not, or else I wouldn't have gotten this," he whipped the two pieces of card out from his inside pocket, smirking as he waited for her reaction. Confusedly, she took one in hand and turned it over, face frozen comically for a second before eventually her eyes were wider than he'd ever seen.

Ringo had looked *less* surprised seeing a demogorgan appear in front of her.

"Oh my *GOD!*" She shouted, capturing the attention of everyone in the room. "*NO.* You're lying. I swear, if you're lying. Oh my god, Steve!"

He was full on laughing at her response by now, her hands and arms

flailing around dramatically and eyes checking every detail to make sure it wasn't fake.

"What is it?" Julia asked her finally.

"It's *tickets* to see *Stevie* motherfuckin' *Nicks*!" Her voice was still an octave too loud, causing everyone to wince at its volume, except Steve - who was still rather enjoying the display. He remembered her mentioning she had never been to a concert or gig, and thought who better to give her tickets for than her favourite singer?

"I got two tickets, I'm hoping that means you're gonna take me," he teased, returning her attention to him. Ringo leaned in and peppered his cheek with kisses, practically jumping on the seat with elation.

"This is the best present ever, oh my god! Thank you!"

All members of the group under eighteen had relocated to the basement, now joined by the rest of the group and a rather timid looking Jane. She had never experienced Christmas before - perhaps throwing her into their mix was a little too much too soon. Nonetheless, she spent the night by Max and Mike's side. Ringo's face nearly split from grinning every time she saw the two girls together and being friendly.

Those two were two of the best girls she knew, pitting each other against the other was unnecessary when they could make such good friends.

Meanwhile, Dustin was in the midst of trying to teach Steve a new handshake, which he was purposefully messing up every time out of enjoyment for the boy's frustration. Lucas and Will were *trying* and failing to watch a Christmas movie, distracted by the commotion around them while they dipped into the snacks available to them. Jonathan and Nancy were snuggling in the corner, and Jessica was full of concentration as she switched the sides around on her new rubix cube.

Jessica noticed Ringo's silence as the blonde gazed around at her peers with a quiet admiration, and nudged her with her elbow to

snap her out of a daze.

"You okay, Ringo?" She tilted her head, eyes switching between her friend and the cube in her hands.

"You know what?" She began, catching Steve's eye over Dustin's shoulder, as he crossed his eyes and stuck his tongue out to make her laugh. "I've never been better."

It had taken Ringo Wheeler quite a while to admit she loved Hawkins, Indiana. Even longer to confess to loving her current boyfriend, Steve. As dysfunctional as their group was, and as much as they seemed to attract danger, she decided she wouldn't change their little squad for the world and would defend them to the ends of the earth.

And when defending them didn't work, she always had her trusty axe laying in the trunk of Steve's car.

THE END.

Hello everyone!

I've been trying not to get emotional by reaching the end of this book, because it really isn't the end and there's a sequel coming soon. That being said, it's still the end of something.

I never thought Slow Ride would come this far, it's literally an idea I had one day while rewatching Stranger Things. I saw little areas that I could insert a character into, and thus came this book, and Ringo.

Ringo was inspired by a combination of iconic 80s and 90s female characters, including Veronica Sawyer from Heathers, Buffy Summers and Kat Stratford. Currently, I'm writing four fics, and Ringo is by far my favourite to write about and relate to. She's the girl I wanted to be and a person I strive to become, despite all her flaws. I'll be honest, I can't really watch Stranger Things any more without thinking there's a gap there.

When I started this book, it was only getting a couple of reads per

chapter and I was convinced it was going to go nowhere, but it didn't matter because I enjoyed writing it.

Thanks so so much to anyone who ever reviewed or even simply read the book. I can't let go of the characters I've made this easy, and that came my decision to write a sequel.

The sequel will be called Fast Car. There will be a short break between now and the chapters being released for Fast Car, mainly because I don't want to write too much before knowing what happens in Stranger Things 3. If I had to guess a rough time, I'd say May is when I'll start writing again. But I'm definitely coming back, so if you're interested in reading more about these absolute weirdos please either keep following this story for the post I make about Fast Car being published or follow my profile!

Thank you so much again. This feels like my child is graduating, my god. I hope to see some of you soon and thanks for making it this far. xxx

RedVelvetPanPan - Ugh i'm so glad someone likes their humour they really are a bunch of dorks hahaha

StrangerThings11HungerGames - oh my god I am SO sad about this ending, Slow Ride is such a comfort to write I can't deal! It makes me so happy to hear this story makes your day! I hope you liked this epilogue and I can't wait to hear your reaction, I hope you'll like Fast Car when I post it. Thanks so much for always being so kind and supportive, you're an absolute star x

Vince Basile Jr - I closed the story the way it went the whole time, with Ringo and Steve being absolute dorks. I'm so sad to end this book, I hope you like this epilogue and thank you so much for being so supportive throughout! x

candy95 - The epilogue was more happier because the last chapter ended quite sad! I hope you liked it and if you decide to read it, that you'll like Fast Car too! Thanks so much for always being so supportive x

Kylorensgirl213 - Here's the last update! Hope you liked it x

43. Sequel!

The sequel for Slow Ride is now up! You can find it through my profile, it's titled 'Fast Car'. I'm so excited to get into it, the first couple of chapters will take place just before the events of Season 3 seeing as I don't actually know how the series will go down yet, haha.

Thanks so much everyone who read Slow Ride, I hope you'll like the sequel if you intend on reading it. x